



THE PARTHIAN AND EARLY SASANIAN EMPIRES

ADAPTATION AND EXPANSION

edited by
Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, Elizabeth J. Pendleton,
Michael Alram and Touraj Daryaee



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THE PARTHIAN AND EARLY SASANIAN EMPIRES: ADAPTATION AND EXPANSION

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PROCEEDINGS OF A CONFERENCE HELD IN VIENNA, 14–16 JUNE
2012

Edited by

VESTA SARKHOSH CURTIS, ELIZABETH J. PENDLETON,
MICHAEL ALRAM AND TOURAJ DARYAEE



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*Front cover: Rock carving at Naqsh-e Rostam, Iran: Ardashir I (left) tramples the defeated Parthian king Artabanus IV and receives
his symbol of kingship from Ohrmazd, the Wise Lord, © G. Herrmann; Sasanian silver coin, showing bust of Ardashir I (AD 224–240)
and the Zoroastrian fire, © Trustees of the British Museum.*

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Introduction

In 2011 it was decided to hold an international conference at the British Museum on the Partho-Sasanian periods in connection with the *Sylloge Nummorum Parthorum* (SNP) project. This international project, directed by Dr Michael Alram and Dr Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, has as its aim the publication of a series of volumes dealing with the coinage from the beginning of the Parthian period in the third century BC to its ending with the advent of the Sasanians in the early third century AD. The project is principally numismatic in nature but also deals with the history, religion and art of the Parthian period. Coin holdings from the American Numismatic Society, the Berlin Coin Cabinet, the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, the British Museum, the Coin Cabinet of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, and the National Museum of Iran in Tehran will be published by representatives of these institutions, who are working in close cooperation with Chris Hopkins, the database manager of www.parthia.com. He has custom-built a web-based database for this project, www.sylloge.org, so that project members can all access the most up-to-date data simultaneously. In addition to coins from the participating institutions, the collection of the late David Sellwood will be included. Where necessary to present a complete picture of the Parthian monetary system, coins from auction catalogues are also incorporated. In 2012, not long after the conference, the first volume of the SNP was published by the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Written by Fabrizio Sinisi, this first book to appear is chronologically the seventh in the series and covers the period from Vologases I to Pacorus II. This will be followed by the coins of Mithradates II (Volume 2) and Phraates IV to Orodes III (Volume 5) in 2017–18.

Although much of the primary information about the Parthian period comes from coins, it is essential to widen the spectrum and to include scholars from different disciplines working on the Parthian and early Sasanian periods. This conference was planned specifically to provide a platform to scholars from a broad range of disciplines.

By the end of 2011, however, political relations between the UK and Iran had deteriorated and the British

Embassy in Tehran had closed. It became clear that London would not be able to host Iranian scholars at such a symposium. During a period of despair, Neil MacGregor, the Director of the British Museum, came up with an ingenious suggestion that allowed the conference to go ahead. He identified that the obstacle lay in the location, not the conference itself, and suggested finding a different venue. After discussions between the project's co-directors in London and Vienna, Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Michael Alram, the Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Austrian Academy of Sciences wholeheartedly agreed to host the event instead. The conference was swiftly switched to Vienna, invitations sent out and visas arranged. All this would not have been possible without the quick and efficient response of the Austrian partners at very short notice. This offers a perfect example of international cooperation whereby colleagues could help each other to provide a forum for scholarly discussions at a politically sensitive time.

The conference opened at the Kunsthistorisches Museum on 14 June 2012 and was held over two and a half days. Neil MacGregor flew in especially from London to be at the opening and gave a speech in which he emphasised the importance of international cooperation and dialogue between institutions separated by political boundaries. His enthusiasm and support were much appreciated by the organisers and participating scholars, especially the Iranian colleagues who otherwise would not have been included in this symposium.

After a brief introduction by the joint directors of the *Sylloge Nummorum Parthorum* project, the conference was launched with a series of papers covering various aspects of the Partho-Sasanian empires. Although the SNP project focuses solely on the Parthian period, the existence of the well-established and highly acclaimed *Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidarum*, headed by Michael Alram and Rika Gyselen, prompted the organisers to extend the remit of this Vienna conference to include papers on Sasanian themes. In addition, a further impetus to encompass the Sasanians came from the successfully completed *Sylloge*

of *Sasanian Coins in the National Museum of Iran* by Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, M. Elahé Askari and Elizabeth J. Pendleton. Despite a change of ruling dynasty, the two empires were closely connected and cannot be regarded as totally separate entities. The continuation of Parthian influence particularly into the early Sasanian period cannot be disputed. Indeed, it is hoped that the continuity between the Parthian and Sasanian empires will be the subject of a second conference in the future.

In the last decade or so, more interest has been noticeable in the Arsacid Parthians and their material culture but this period is still underestimated. Various reasons account for this, including the relatively few excavated archaeological sites dating to the Parthian period in Iran and western scholars' lack of knowledge of recent excavations and their results that are usually published in Persian. Although an attempt has been made by several scholars in the west to place this important Iranian dynasty in its proper cultural context, the traditional Greco-Roman influenced approach is still prevalent, even in the twenty-first century.

The present volume presents fourteen papers covering various aspects of Parthian and early Sasanian history, material culture, linguistics and religion:

JÉRÔME GASLAIN discusses aspects of the political and military history of the early Arsacids. Contrary to traditional interpretations, based principally on classical sources, he dismisses the notion that Arsaces I and the Parni were nomadic invaders with no knowledge of the Seleucid political system. He argues that "from early on, the Arsacids surely occupied an important place in the political game of the satrapies", which is contrary to the image presented by ancient sources such as Justin, Polybius and Strabo, a view followed by a number of modern scholars. Gaslain suggests that the early Arsacids were skillful rulers both domestically and in their foreign policy. They were a force to be reckoned with by both the Seleucids in the west and the Bactrians in the east.

RAHIM SHAYEGAN examines Arsacid royal ideology within the context of other kingdoms of the Hellenistic period, including Mithridates VI of Pontus and the kings of Commagene. He focuses on the presentation of their ancestry and argues that the Arsacids under Mithradates II adopted the title King of Kings through Babylonian traditions rather than as a conscious revival of the Achaemenid past. This type of conscious manipulation of ancestry comes into play during the reign of Artabanus II, when Tacitus reports that the Arsacid king justified his territorial claims over Armenia by referring to both the Achaemenids and Alexander. Shayegan then draws a parallel between this passage and similar claims by Mithridates VI of Pontus, as reported in Justin's *Epitome*. He goes on to examine genealogical constructs in Commagene and concludes that here the inspiration came perhaps from the Arsacids.

MAREK JAN OLBRYCHT looks at the rivalry amongst the Arsacid ruling dynasty in the first century BC, in particular the conflict between the Sinatruclids and the descendants of Mithradates II. This resulted in a dichotomy amongst the elite, with the aristocratic clans supporting one or other of the factions. He goes on to examine potential links between the Indo-Parthians and the Sinatruclids in the first to second centuries AD. He also re-examines the relationship between the coins of the later Gondopharids under Farn-Sāsān and those of Ardashir I and prefers the theory that Ardashir imitated coins of Farn-Sāsān rather than vice versa, as has been generally accepted. He concludes that Ardashir may have been an Arsacid prince who came to power with the support of the Sūrēn and Kārin clans. Both he and his successor, Shapur I, presented a different view of their ancestry by downplaying the role of Sāsān.

TOURAJ DARYAEE gives an overview of the use and meaning of elephants from the Achaemenid period to Islamic times. He draws on a variety of sources, including the *Karnamag* of Ardashir and the *Shahnameh* and classical authors such as Ammianus Marcellinus and Tacitus, as well as less familiar Armenian accounts. In addition, he examines representations of elephants in Parthian, Sasanian and Roman art, as well as on coins. He describes differing military tactics of using elephants both as "tanks" and also as a centre of operations. He sees elephants both as a weapon of terror and as a symbol of kingship in the ancient Iranian world.

MEHRDAD GHODRAT-DIZAJI discusses the physical location of the province of Parthia from Achaemenid to Sasanian times. In the Achaemenid period there is a striking similarity between Herodotus's location of the Parthian satrapy in the north-east and the list of north-eastern provinces given by Darius at Bisitun. The Arsacid province of Parthia seems to have occupied a similar location as in the Achaemenid period. It is generally believed that Parthia occupied the same territory in the Sasanian period as it had in Parthian and Achaemenid times. Dizaji, however, cites evidence to suggest that from the late Parthian period, the province of Parthia shifted to the central plateau, bordering Pārs and Khuzistān. Over time, it expanded still further to the west.

ANDREA GARIBOLDI looks at the question of historical awareness of the Sasanians in Roman sources, particularly Ammianus Marcellinus and Julian. He addresses the vital question of whether the Romans were aware of the change from the Parthian to Sasanian dynasty. Ammianus does not refer to the dynastic change in Persia and uses the terms *Persae* and *Parthi* for the Sasanians. According to Julian, the Sasanians did not wish to be identified with the Parthians and therefore presented themselves as Persians. Gariboldi

discusses to what extent this is purely a Roman rhetorical device or whether the Sasanians were truly aware of the Persian past. He concludes that ancestry is an important aspect of Iranian historiography.

ANTONIO PANAINO discusses the Sasanians and their impact on the development of Zoroastrianism, in particular in western Iran. Here he uses evidence from ritual and theological Mazdean texts, established during and after the Sasanians came to power. While this tradition in the west is rich, we have little information about the eastern Zoroastrian liturgy, where local traditions were strong. This gap in data for the east is partly filled by archaeological evidence. Panaino examines Kirdēr's inscriptions to illuminate his position at the Sasanian court and within society at large, and comes to the conclusion that Kirdēr's "mission" may not have been fully shared by the Sasanian kings. Nevertheless, his influence on the Zoroastrian religion was crucial. He concludes by looking at Kirdēr's visions and how ritual had both theological and political ramifications.

RIKA GYSELEN takes as her subject the survival into the Sasanian period of Parthian, a Middle Iranian language of the north-east. She begins by making a clear distinction between Pahlavi/Pārsīg, or Middle Persian, a southern Middle Iranian language, and Parthian. She shows that Parthian survived as an official language employed by the early Sasanian kings until the end of the third century AD, after which no traces of it have been identified on royal monumental inscriptions. She then looks for evidence of the survival of Parthian into Sasanian times on non-royal objects, examining the silver plate of Krasnaya Polyana and four Sasanian seals, as well as the use of Parthian on Sasanian magic seals. She concludes that Parthian fell out of use as a "royal" language after the end of the third century and as a "common" language after the fourth/fifth century AD. In Parthian-speaking regions, Middle Persian replaced the Parthian language.

KHODADAD REZAKHANI deals with the epigraphic development from Aramaic to Pahlavi, as seen on the coinage of Persis. This particular group of coins, unlike other Hellenistic issues, does not use Greek for its inscriptions. He believes that Inscription Pahlavi is not purely a development from this script of Persis but that other influences can be detected. In addition to Inscription Pahlavi, there were other Pahlavi scripts including the Manichean script, derived from Aramaic, and Book Pahlavi, the most common Middle Persian script, the evidence for which dates mostly from the post-Sasanian period, as well as cursive Pahlavi. His examination of the Persis coinage suggests that under the last two kings of this dynasty significant changes can be traced in the letter forms. In order to account for these changes, he looks at the coin legends of Characene and Elymais, as well

as Indo-Scythians in the east, and finally discusses briefly the possible origin of the Sasanian dynasty in Sakastan.

DARYOOSH AKBARZADEH focuses on two points as found in post-Sasanian sources: the confusion about the Parthian king Ardavan (Artabanus), who is described variously as both "the first" (*aqdam*) and "the last" (*afdom*). He discusses the beginnings of the Parthian dynasty and shows that Islamic sources agree that Ashk (Arsaces) ibn Ashk or Ashk ibn Dara was the founder of the Arsacid Parthian dynasty. He concludes that the discrepancy between "first" and "last" with reference to Ardavan is the result of scribal error. In his second note, he addresses the problem of the genealogy of the Parthians and focuses specifically on the relationship of the Parthians with Arash the archer.

ANTONIO INVERNIZZI discusses the reconstruction of the Round Hall at Nisa and rejects a Hellenistic antecedent for roofing the building as suggested by Pugachenkova. He searches instead for a Near Eastern model and rejects the theory that the inclination of the walls of the Round Hall was caused by an earthquake. He argues that the absence of other similar Parthian domes does not prove that they did not exist and that later Sasanian domes were technically so advanced that they could not have been a sudden invention. Invernizzi sees the origin of the domed Round Hall in the domed buildings of Chorasmia in the ninth to eighth centuries BC. It is in Central Asia that the domed structure was used for funerary purposes. This tradition continued under the early Arsacids when the Round Hall at Nisa was probably built to commemorate Mithradates I and his ancestors.

BARBARA KAIM examines in detail Iranian court life in Arsacid and the early Sasanian periods in view of the meagre and often biased written sources. She therefore focuses on an additional source of information, namely the architectural decoration of palaces. In her view, the only royal capital that provides information is Nisa and here she discusses the architecture and the theme of banquets and wine. She also includes in her study the iconography of early to mid-Arsacid coins and the change in iconography over time. Here she includes royal women and their role at court. In the current absence of residential buildings associated directly with Arsacid rulers, she moves to western Iran and the site of Qaleh-i Yazdigird, near Kirmanshah, with its rich figural and architectural stucco decorations. This was the seat of a Parthian noble. Both here and in her discussion of Bishapur in southern Iran, she touches on the question of Dionysian iconography and its role within a possible Zoroastrian context. She finally looks at Bishapur and its mosaic decoration and concludes that these were part of a royal palace.

PIERRE-YVES BOILLET aims at quantifying the monetary production in Parthian times at Ecbatana and Media and what

impact the change from Seleucid to Parthian rule had on coin production. He examines the history of Media as presented in classical sources and points out that literary and archaeological evidence is limited. In the lack of these sources, coins provide important information and he bases his study on several thousand Parthian coins in major coin cabinets, as well as coins that feature in sales catalogues. Boillet performs various statistical analyses on this data set and shows that although there is nothing to indicate a change in the nature of trade from Seleucid to Parthian times, nevertheless the output of money seems to be reduced under the Arsacids. There is a decline in bronzes and a rise of minting drachms and the Seleucid tradition of minting tetradrachms at Ecbatana disappears completely. He raises the question of whether political instability and internal rivalries had an effect on coin production under certain kings.

In the final paper, NIKOLAUS SCHINDEL deals with the coinages of Paradan and Sind in the context of Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian coinage and addresses the question of whether Sasanian coins had direct influence on these eastern coins or not. He examines the depiction of ribbed ribbons on Kushan, Sasanian and Paradan coinage, which he believes argues against the commonly accepted date of 127 AD for

the start date of the Kanishka era. His second subject is the coinage of Sind and its Sasanian prototypes. Here Schindel examines new material and comes to the conclusion that the Sind coinage was indirectly associated with Sasanian Iran. He suggests that the gold coins of Marw in the fourth and early fifth centuries AD were the possible inspiration behind the Sind coins, which were minted in gold rather than silver.

No conference can be organised without financial and human support, and the Vienna conference was no exception. Generous grants from the British Institute of Persian Studies at the British Academy, the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the British Museum and the Bahari Foundation, as well as the Royal Numismatic Society, made it possible to invite a wide range of scholars from the USA to Iran to gather together at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna for two and a half days to discuss various aspects of the Partho-Sasanian world. Just as important as financial help was the human support and encouragement from a number of quarters, including Neil MacGregor, Andrew Burnett, J.D. Hill, Philip Attwood and Mark Bates of the British Museum, and Ali Ansari, Mariam Emamy and the Research Board of the British Institute of Persian Studies (BIPS).

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HISTORICAL

Some Aspects of Political History: Early Arsacid Kings and the Seleucids

Jérôme Gaslain

AURORHE*

The beginnings of the Arsacid dynasty remain mysterious in many ways. It is difficult to determine accurately the process of the creation of the kingdom. The period that most challenges us is the third century BC, which does not provide information reliable enough to draw a detailed picture of the Arsacid world of that time. It is unfortunate, for example, that we are still unable to ascertain firmly the dates of the reigns of the first sovereigns,¹ to establish which territories were actually under their control, or to understand the intricacies of their domestic politics.²

Some events can, however, be used to establish landmarks in the first decades of the Arsacid dynasty in the context of the Upper Satrapies, when the transition between Seleucid power and Arsacid authority took place.

In this paper, far from considering the Arsacid kings as nomads arriving by chance to seize power in Parthia, we propose to evaluate, as much as possible, the knowledge of the Seleucid government that they could have had. One cannot indeed see them as ignorant of the political stakes in the region. In search of proof, we will focus on the first two Arsacid reigns, those of Arsaces I (238–210 BC) and his son Arsaces II (210–190 BC). This will give us the opportunity to show that the Parthians had a political consciousness from their very entry into history.³

Arsaces I and Seleucid satrapian power

The image of Arsaces is that he was a nomad who managed to seize power in Parthia with some companions in arms, after the murder of the satrap Andragoras, himself emancipated

from Seleucid power in 247 BC.⁴ This version of events comes from the Greco-Latin texts, which, though often contradictory,⁵ all agree that Arsaces was an enigmatic character who took advantage of the weakness of the Seleucid government in the Upper Satrapies to establish his own authority. Without going into any detail, let us make a simple remark. Overthrowing a satrap who himself had been able to defect from Seleucid power could not have been an easy matter. It goes without saying that the warlord Arsaces was more than a *simple thief*, and saying, as Justin claimed (41, 4, 7), that he overthrew the satrap by “surprise” is pure historical fantasy. In other words, Arsaces could not have just been the enigmatic nomad at the time of the death of Andragoras (238 BC).

We know that even before his emancipation in 247 BC, Andragoras held an important position in the Seleucid administration at the time of Antiochus I.⁶ His authority was therefore well established and Arsaces could not ignore this situation when he *attacked* Parthia. Andragoras was not merely a rebellious satrap without military⁷ and economic resources. It therefore appears that Arsaces had real means to eliminate a satrap, who must himself have been fully aware of the dangers in and around Parthia.

*

Following Strabo (*Geography*) and Justin (Epitome of the *Philippic Histories* of Pompeius Trogus),⁸ the Parni, a part of the Dahae confederacy (Scythians), came from the Aral Sea region. They had migrated to the south, maybe early in the third century BC, and then were repelled by Bactrian forces (Strabo, 11, 9, 2–3).⁹ That is why they went to the west.¹⁰

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I want to thank warmly M. Alram and V.S. Curtis, and all the members of the Sylloge Nummorum Parthicorum group, for their support.

It is difficult to reconstruct the exact movement of these nomads, the exact reasons for this movement, the true place and role of Arsaces in relation to these nomads¹¹ and how he finally arrived in Parthia and seized power.¹² For example, some scholars have supposed that Arsaces was a mercenary. This is an attractive hypothesis.¹³ Even if we have no actual evidence supporting it, it seems not impossible to see Arsaces as a member of the local “élite” of Parthia, with a real knowledge of the military and political spheres of the Seleucid satrapy. With early Parthian history, we must be very careful to remember that we can consider these assertions only as a hypothesis. Nevertheless, the role of Arsaces before 238 BC must not be understated, as we shall see.

What is important for us is that the Parni were well aware of the territories and knew the populations and political situation of the region. Following the texts, it seems that the migration of the Parni was progressive, rather than a single stride resulting in the conquest of Parthia proper.¹⁴ From 282/1 to 238 BC, the Parni had exerted a real influence around the Parthian area.¹⁵ Arsaces, as a member of this confederacy, seems therefore far from being the instigator of an accidental invasion. The presence of these nomads did not, however, profoundly disrupt the structure of the Upper Satrapies before the conquest of Media by the Arsacids (148/7 BC),¹⁶ but this position provided the Parthians with the means profitably to control the trade routes, and so the taxes, which connected Media to the cities of Margiana, Bactria and beyond.

The simultaneous Greco-Bactrian and Parthian “secessions” in the middle of the third century BC were in fact a response to the failure of Seleucid power combined with the will of the new leaders, Diodotus and Andragoras, to create new protective authorities for the region.¹⁷ This was not only a question of personal ambition, but also a necessary action to reassure the Greek and Iranian populations about these new leaders. When Arsaces seized power in 238 BC,¹⁸ this requirement still remained and he could devote no less effort to satisfy it. From a political point of view, Arsaces had a double mission: he needed to be recognised within his own kingdom as the new authority and, for this to happen, he had to confirm his presence at the head of Parthia in the eyes of the Bactrian leader especially and, afterwards, in the eyes of Seleucid central power. To achieve these goals, Arsaces needed to call upon every possible tool at his disposal, not only military,¹⁹ but also political and diplomatic.

When Justin indicates that Arsaces raised a large army in fear of Diodotus I, it proves not only that the threat was real for the Parthians but it also shows that, from early on, the Arsacids surely occupied an important place in the political game of the satrapies. That is why, when Strabo writes that Arsaces was Bactrian (11, 9, 3), we agree that it could signify that he had been in the Seleucid territories for a long time.²⁰ Justin (41, 4, 9) continues his comment by indicating that Arsaces finally became an ally of the

second Bactrian ruler. This treaty of alliance – of which we know no details – at least proves that contacts between Arsacid and Bactrian leaders had probably been established for a long time. Thus negotiation formed part of the early Arsacids’ political practices and this established fact was not unknown to the Seleucids. At the time of the emancipation of Andragoras and Diodotus, it seems difficult to believe that on one hand both parties were unaware of the other’s actions; equally on the other hand both must have known the position of the Parni, as a buffer between Bactrian and Parthian territories. Consequently, when our sources state that a treaty of alliance was concluded between Arsaces I and Diodotus II, it seems to be merely a renewal of the practice introduced between Parthia and Bactria some years before, out of diplomatic necessity. This treaty of alliance must not be considered as an exceptional operation.

*

That said, although it is difficult to doubt that the Parthians were nomads who invaded the territory of Parthia, this does not mean that Arsaces was part of a sudden invasion. He maybe could have taken advantage of his favourable position to lead rather a *revolution*, which inevitably implied an invasion of the territory of Parthia-Hyrcania, as our sources emphasise. The fact that Arsaces was able to raise thereafter a large army (Justin 41, 4, 8) could confirm the importance of his military capacities.

A decade elapsed between the time Andragoras took power in 247 BC from the Seleucids and the time when Arsaces seized control from Andragoras (238 BC). Justin informs us that Parthians had already rebelled against the Seleucid government at the time of the First Punic War in the mid-third century BC (41, 4, 3–4). In a recent publication, historians have tried to involve Arsaces in these first revolts which they date back to 247 BC, which would explain why the Arsacid calendar was dependent on that year. In the same vein, they maintain that Arsaces emerged victorious from a battle against Seleucus II, then viceroy of the Upper Satrapies, and suppose that Arsaces would have been crowned king in 247 BC as a celebration of this victory.²¹

We are more than sceptical with regard to this vision of history.²² First, this supposed battle appears nowhere in the sources, as Justin simply tells us that the Parthians “rebelled”, adding that this defection “remained unpunished” (Justin, 41, 4, 3–4). Moreover, we should not forget that the inhabitants of Parthia are *not* interchangeable with Arsaces’s Parthians, and it is very difficult to grasp who the Parthians were for Justin in this passage of “his” *Historiae Philippicae*. Besides, if Arsaces had won a victory against the Seleucid armies, for which, we should remember, we have no evidence, either direct or indirect, then this would mean that there was on the political scene of Parthia a winner who not only did not exploit his victory but even allowed Andragoras to take power and then to emancipate his territory. If this scenario

were correct, Arsaces must have allowed a decade to pass before eliminating the satrap, and yet no source mentions this failure to follow through. This version seems therefore difficult to accept.²³

So, let us remain cautious as to the progress of events. The year 247 BC may correspond to the seizure of power by Andragoras, who subsequently escaped from Seleucid power, maybe in 245.²⁴ Thus 247 BC might have been important enough to result in the creation of a calendar which is called “Parthian” rather than “Arsacid”, and which the Parthians took as the starting point of their territory’s independence.

Arsaces I, Arsaces II and the Seleucid military campaigns

The military campaigns of Seleucus II (228 BC) and Antiochus III (209 BC) in the Upper Satrapies aimed at restoring Seleucid authority in those regions and bringing back a semblance of order that had been lost for some years. During these two expeditions, the Seleucid armies faced the forces of the Arsacid sovereigns, Arsaces I and Arsaces II. In the light of the literary sources, it would be difficult to form a definitive opinion of the outcome of these confrontations:

- Strabo (11, 8, 8) comments that when faced with the Seleucid onslaught under Seleucus II, Arsaces I withdrew to the country of the *Apasiacae*. Justin (41, 4, 9), on the other hand, specifies that Arsaces “was victorious”.
- As for Arsaces II, we learn that he fought with an “admirable courage” and that in the end he became “the ally” of Antiochus III. But according to Polybius (10, 28, 6 and 10, 29, 1), Arsaces II also “retreated with his army” and “abandoned his own territory” as the Seleucid army marched on Parthia.

Given the above conflicting accounts, how may we determine exactly what took place during the two Seleucid-Parthian encounters?

This question cannot be satisfactorily answered if we limit ourselves only to the military objectives of the two campaigns. We shall, therefore, attempt to throw a fresh light on some aspects of Parthian history by deviating slightly from the narrow vision, which suggests that the political awareness of the early Arsacids was somewhat limited. Considering the outcome of the two Seleucid military expeditions which the nascent Arsacid dynasty had to face, we believe that Arsaces I and his son Arsaces II were neither politically nor militarily inexperienced.

The flight of the two Arsacid sovereigns from their encounters with the Seleucids cannot be taken at face value as they are recounted in the literary sources. We shall, therefore, agree with Polybius (10, 29, 2) that Arsaces II, like his father Arsaces I, really had “another idea”.

Arsaces I and Seleucus II

Around 228 BC, Seleucus tried to retake the Upper Satrapies.²⁵ If we follow the literary sources, we note that upon the arrival of the Seleucid troops, Arsaces I retreated to the territories of the *Apasiacae*. Following Strabo, it is thus necessary to maintain that the Seleucid king triumphed over his opponent. This is reflected in the coins struck to celebrate the Seleucid victory.²⁶ Despite the fact that Seleucus II had to abandon his Parthian expedition in order to return hastily and restore order in the western lands of his kingdom, the campaign in the east was thus deemed successful. This fact cannot be ignored, because if he had returned as a defeated ruler, Seleucus’s authority would have been severely undermined.

Nevertheless, Justin writes that Arsaces I prevailed in this particular encounter and it is his version of the events that we must follow for several reasons. First, we are told that soon after Seleucus’s march back to the west, Arsaces I returned and recaptured the land that he had lost to the Seleucid king. He thus extended his power, once again, up to the region of Hecatompylus, which had probably been under Parthian jurisdiction for some years.²⁷ Arsaces I then controlled Hyrcania, Comisene, Charene and Parthia itself. This view agrees with Polybius, who indicates that during the Anabasis of Antiochus III in 209 BC, Arsaces II was not surprised to witness the arrival of the Seleucid army, but he did not expect the Seleucid king to attack the territories beyond the Caspian Gates.²⁸

The flight of Arsaces I cannot thus be considered as a defeat. Instead, it may be seen as a strategic withdrawal in the face of the powerful Seleucid army, probably well thought out and certainly tactically advantageous. It was not merely the return of Seleucus II to the west that rendered Arsaces victorious, but rather that this particular retreat made a great deal of sense, both in military and political terms. The Seleucid king had neither the means to pursue Arsaces beyond the southern shores of the Caspian Sea nor sufficient time to negotiate a peace treaty. In other words, Arsaces remained the master of the situation. He had since 238 BC controlled Parthia-Hyrcania and, following his accession to power – and even before as we have tried to demonstrate, gained a good knowledge of the political situation. He strove to be accepted by the populations of Parthia and seemingly gave priority to the affairs of his immediate neighbours too. Inspired by the Hellenistic traditions represented on the region’s coinage (e.g. the legends in Greek and/or the diadem), Arsaces did not adopt the royal title on his coins²⁹ as the successor of Andragoras. Nevertheless, he distanced himself from purely Hellenistic traditions by using the so-called *bashlyk* and the enthroned archer holding the bow, a king of double language, leading to adaptation rather than upheaval.³⁰ Arsaces appears both as an experienced negotiator, if we consider his relationship with the Greco-Bactrians, and as a fine strategist with regard to the campaign of Seleucus II. The Seleucid king thus found himself confronting a leader with good political and military

senses. When Antiochus III undertook his Anabasis, he did not set out from Ecbatana without careful planning, knowing that in order to march successfully as far as Bactria, he had to negotiate the roads through Parthian territories that were guarded by Arsaces II who was like his father, endowed with political awareness.

Arsaces II and Antiochus III

When Arsaces II ascended to the throne in 211 BC, the political situation was different from when Arsaces I revolted against the Seleucids. At this point, the Arsacids had controlled Parthia and Hyrcania for almost thirty years. They were thus perceived as the undisputed masters of the region with little to fear from their Bactrian neighbours. It is obvious that the Arsacids viewed the campaign of Antiochus III not so much as a logical attempt by the Seleucids to retake their lost satrapies, but more as an attack on a territory which had been theirs since, at least, 238 BC. This explains why, upon the arrival of the Seleucid army, the Parthian defenders destroyed the *qanats*³¹ of Charene and Comisene, the most fertile region of Parthia. This was planned not only to slow down Antiochus's march, but also to be a testimony of resistance to a former occupying foreign force. In the eyes of the Parthians, the campaign of Seleucus II may have been justified, but the Anabasis of Antiochus III lacked legitimacy. Although they understood the reasons behind Antiochus's campaign, they took it as an infringement upon their authority, which had not been questioned since 228 BC. For Arsaces II, it was also a crucial moment to assert the power he had just inherited from his father, while for Antiochus III, it was an ideal opportunity to end the rising power of the Arsacid dynasty.

The abandonment of Hecatompylus by Arsaces II and its consequent fall were perceived even then as the sign of a Parthian defeat. Nevertheless, Justin speaks of peace and alliance between Antiochus III and Arsaces II (41, 5, 7) as well as between Arsaces I and Diodotus II. Unfortunately, as we have already mentioned, we know very little about these alliances and thus cannot offer any conclusion about their nature and content.³² What seems certain, however, is that Arsaces II was not subjugated by Antiochus III any more than Arsaces I had been by Seleucus II. The flight of Arsaces II had been carefully planned to prevent his submission and this, we believe, is "the other idea" that Polybius implies. In order not to face the powerful Seleucid army and suffer a fatal defeat, Arsaces II retreated and by doing so was able to preserve his father's conquests. It is even possible that, in order to weaken the power of Euthydemus of Bactria, Arsaces II let the Seleucid army pass through the Parthian territories unopposed and march on Bactria. We can pose many questions on the treaty of alliance between Arsaces I and Diodotus II, to which we cannot offer any convincing

answer. However, we believe that, by not facing the Seleucids, Arsaces II protected his territorial possessions both skilfully and pragmatically. This leads to a better understanding of the reasons behind the treaty of alliance between Arsaces II and Antiochus III.

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In conclusion, it is important to recognise that the early Arsacids possessed a real awareness of their status, combined with an intimate knowledge of the Parthian territories and of the political situation of the region, even before they seized power. It is difficult to believe that Arsaces I and his son were only nomads lacking political finesse, as they are usually portrayed. The Seleucids, like the Greco-Bactrians, could not ignore this fact, and this is why we find the Arsacids from the very beginning as active players within the political context of the Upper Satrapies. The first two Arsacids played a crucial role in this. Arsaces I and his son were not only pragmatic kings³³ in their pursuit of foreign politics but also within the territories under their control.

Notes

- 1 Dąbrowa 2011, p. 249, n. 26.
- 2 Lerner 1999, p. 13–31.
- 3 Gaslain 2012, p. 255, n. 4.
- 4 Bivar 2005, p. 212–214.
- 5 Lerouge 2007, p. 175, p. 178. See also Muccioli 2007, p. 87–115.
- 6 Capdetrey 2007, p. 127.
- 7 Capdetrey 2007, p. 257, p. 357.
- 8 Magnelli 1993, p. 467–479. Lerouge-Cohen 2009, p. 361–392.
- 9 Coloru 2009, p. 169ff.
- 10 Will 2003, I, p. 303.
- 11 About nomadism and the Arsacids, Hauser 2005, p. 163–208 and Hauser 2006, p. 295–319.
- 12 Will 2003, I, p. 302–303, p. 307. Lerouge 2007, p. 176, n. 9.
- 13 Olbrycht 2003, p. 73.
- 14 Bernard 1994, p. 484. Houghton/Lorber 2002, p. 213.
- 15 Will 2003, I, p. 302. Houghton/Lorber 2002, p. 213.
- 16 About Arsacid Media, see Boillet 2009 and in this volume, see Boillet's paper.
- 17 Brodersen 1986, p. 378–381. Kalita 1999, p. 51–67. Luther 1999, p. 5–15. Luther 2006–2007, p. 39–55.
- 18 Wolski 1993, p. 66ff.
- 19 Olbrycht 2003, p. 75. Boyce 1994, p. 247.
- 20 Will 2003, I, p. 302.
- 21 Assar and Bagloo 2006, p. 25–35.
- 22 Gaslain 2009, p. 30, n. 27.
- 23 Will 2003, I, p. 281–282.
- 24 Will 2003, I, p. 302.
- 25 Will 2003, p. 308.
- 26 Houghton and Lorber 2002, I, p. 231, 233, 282.
- 27 Bernard 1994, p. 498ff.
- 28 Will 2003, p. 57.
- 29 See now Olbrycht 2013, p. 63–74 and Dąbrowa 2014, p. 304ff.

- 30 Curtis 2007, p. 8. Dąbrowa 2008, p. 26. See also Günther 2012, p. 53–66.
- 31 Polybius, X, 27.
- 32 Will 2003, II, p. 57.
- 33 On early Arsacid coinage, see the recent hypothesis in Koshelenko and Gaibov 2012, p. 24–33. On Arsacid coinage, see recently Ellerbrock 2013, p. 253–311 and Curtis 2012, p. 68–81.

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The Arsacids and Commagene

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Introduction

The Commagenian kingdom, an Irano-Hellenistic polity bordering Cilicia and Cappadocia in northern Syria, which flourished in the first century before our Common Era, is much too complex a field of study to risk a treatment of its diverse religious, cultural and ideological manifestations within the confines of the present study.

We shall therefore limit ourselves to certain aspects of early Arsacid ideology, with which we may claim some familiarity, and its interactions with the Commagenian cult of ancestors. Although this term may ultimately prove inadequate, it will initially serve us well in this inquiry.

What connects both the early Arsacid and Commagenian ideologies is the incorporation of both Achaemenid and Macedonian/Seleucid ancestry in their genealogical constructions. On the face of it, this may not represent much of a novelty, as other Hellenistic kingdoms, be it Pontus under Mithridates Eupator, or be it Ariarathid Cappadocia, did so as well.¹

Thus, this inquiry will attempt to determine whether the inclusion of Achaemenid and Seleucid *προγόνους* is to be ascribed to a general pattern followed by the (post-) Hellenistic kingdoms, due to comparable dispositions; or was the result of serendipitous coincidences; or finally represented possible cases of emulation.

The Arsacids

But before proceeding further, a succinct depiction of the Arsacid political ideology may be in order. In a recent publication,² we argued that the imperial title of “King of Kings”, the most distinctive Achaemenid attribute, which had fallen into desuetude in the wake of the Macedonian conquest and languished as a forlorn and futile vestige of

the Achaemenid past during the Hellenistic period, had finally seen a comeback a few decades after the conquest of Mesopotamia by Arsacid forces in 141 BC.³

A few more decades had to pass before the imperial title was introduced by an Arsacid sovereign. It appears first, applied to the great Miθrdāt (Mithradates) II, on Babylonian documents in 111 BC.⁴ Later it is attested on Arsacid coinage, and is also employed by other Hellenistic princes of Iranian descent.⁵

We have in the past argued that it was due to the Babylonian possession of its own literary past, namely, its uninterrupted cuneiform tradition, that the Achaemenid title of “King of Kings” may have been resurrected for the Arsacids. In other words, Babylonian scholars, drawing upon their own literary heritage, may have extracted for their new masters a title that had previously belonged to their former Persian overlords. This established a sense of imperial continuity that may have not otherwise existed without the Babylonian agency, and made the Arsacids the recipients rather than the actors in this complex operation of recovery.⁶

However, even the adoption of the former Achaemenid title is not indicative of a conscious political agenda and ideology among the early Arsacids. For this, we have to wait another century to find traces thereof in a letter addressed by the Arsacid king Artabān (Artabanus) II to the Roman emperor Tiberius.⁷

This letter, reported by Tacitus, discusses how Artabān (Artabanus) II, following the death of the Armenian king Artaxias in 35 AD, had placed his own son Aršak on the vacant throne of Armenia. It also mentions the Parthian king’s further hostile intentions towards Rome. Indeed, Artabān II seems to have been voicing his claim to Syria and Cilicia, by virtue of his ancestral rights, that is, on account of the Parthian kings being heirs to both the

Achaemenid empire of Cyrus and the Macedonian empire of Alexander:

Is [Artabanus] metu Germanici fidus Romanis, aequabilis in suos, mox superbiam in nos, saevitiam in populares sumpsit, fretus bellis, quae secunda adversum circumiectas nationes exercuerat, et senectutem Tiberii ut inermem despiciens avidusque Armeniae, cui defuncto rege Artaxia Arsacen liberorum suorum veterrimum inposuit, addita contumelia et missis, qui gazam a Vonone relictam in Syria Ciliciaque reposcerent; simul *veteres Persorum ac Macedonum terminos*, seque invasurum *possessa primum Cyro et post Alexandro* per vaniloquentiam ac minas iaciebat.⁸

“He [Artabanus], in fear of Germanicus, was faithful to Romans and equitable to his own (subjects), but soon assumed (an attitude of) insolence towards us and of fierceness towards (his) people; relying on the wars he had carried out successfully against surrounding nations, disdaining the old age of Tiberius as defenseless, and coveting eagerly Armenia, he installed the eldest of his sons, Arsaces, (on the throne of Armenia) after the death of its king, Artaxias. He added insult to injury by sending emissaries to claim back the treasure left behind by Vonones in Syria and Cilicia. At the same time he threw vain talk and menaces with respect to *the old boundaries of the Persians and the Macedonians*, (saying) that he would seize *what was held first by Cyrus and afterwards by Alexander*.”

What is striking about this double reference to the Arsacids’ Achaemenid and Hellenistic forebears as a justification for claims over disputed territories against Rome is its similarity to another account. This is a well-known passage about the Pontic king Mithridates VI Eupator, written by the Augustan historian Pompeius Trogus, albeit transmitted in Justin’s *Epitome*.

In this account, Justin relates a speech delivered by the Pontic leader to his people in arms on the eve of the first Mithridatic War against Rome in 89 BC. Here, in order to galvanize his constituencies, both Iranian and Hellenic, Mithridates evokes his *maiores*, his ancestors, deriving his house in paternal line from the Achaemenid kings, and in maternal line from Alexander, and the founder of the Seleucid kingdom, Seleucus:

Se autem seu nobilitate illis conparetur clariorem illa conluvie convenarum esse qui paternos maiores suos a *Cyro Darioque conditoribus Persici regni* maternos a *magno Alexandro ac Nicatore Seleuco conditoribus imperii macedonici* referat.⁹

“He [Mithridates] continued that if he was compared with them [the Romans] with respect to extraction, he was more illustrious than that collection of mixed people [the Romans], he, whose ancestors on his father’s side were from *Cyrus and Darius, the founders of the Persian empire*, and on his mother’s side, from *Alexander the Great and Seleucus Nikator, the founders of the Macedonian empire*.”

The analogy between Justin’s account of Mithridates Eupator and Tacitus’s of Artabān (Artabanus) II are, in spite of their differences, sufficiently strong as to prompt the question of whether Tacitus may have been drawing on Pompeius Trogus’s account, and, hence, whether the entire episode centred around the Arsacid king ought to qualify as a literary topos, void of historical content; or is there some substance behind these similarities (whether conscious or accidental) after all?

In order to determine the nature of these similarities, we have to draw upon yet another set of parallels and confuse our readers even further, before eventually shedding some light.

In the third and fourth centuries AD, in the context of more aggressive campaigns against Rome led by the Sasanian emperors Ardashīr (Ardashir) and Šābuhr (Shapur) I, and a century later by Šābuhr (Shapur) II, we encounter once more reports by contemporary Roman historians, among them Cassius Dio and Herodian, that explain Sasanian bellicosity in similar terms:¹⁰

καὶ ἀπειλῶν ἀνακτῆσεσθαι πάντα ὥς καὶ προσήκοντά οἱ ἐκ προγόνων ὅσα ποτὲ οἱ πάλαι Πέρσαι μέχρι τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς θαλάσσης ἔσχον.¹¹

“He (was) menacing to recover *all that the ancient Persians had once held* as far as the Greek Sea, on the grounds that all this belonged to him through *his ancestors*.”

ad usque Strymona flumen et Macedonicos fines tenuisse *maiores imperium meos*, antiquitates quoque vestrae testantur; haec me convenit flagitare ... splendore virtutumque insignium serie, *vetustis regibus* antistantem.¹²

“That *my forefathers’ empire* reached as far as the river Strymon and the boundaries of Macedonia even your own ancient records bear witness; these lands it is fitting that I should demand, since ... I surpass *the kings of old* in magnificence and array of conspicuous virtues.”

In this context, it is noteworthy that Tacitus derives Artabān II’s territorial claims from both the Achaemenid and Macedonian empires, whose founders, Cyrus and Alexander, are explicitly mentioned. In contrast, Dio and Ammianus refer solely to the Achaemenid empire, describing its confines as the Greek Sea (μέχρι τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς θαλάσσης) and the boundaries of Macedonia (*Macedonicos fines*). The reports of Dio and Ammianus also concur in hinting at the rulers of the past without any precision, respectively: the ancient Persians (οἱ πάλαι Πέρσαι), who are subsequently qualified as Ardashīr’s (Ardashir’s) forefathers (οἱ προγόνοι), and the ancestors (*maiores*) who are later identified as the kings of old (*vetusti reges*).

The fundamental difference between these accounts thus resides in the fact that in Tacitus’s narrative the Arsacid

Artabān (Artabanus) II legitimises his claim over disputed Roman territories by associating himself with Alexander and the Macedonians, that is, the Seleucids, Alexander's heirs in Iran, as well as with Cyrus and the Achaemenids, the representatives of "Iranism" proper. In contrast, in the reports of Dio, Herodian, and Ammianus about Ardaxšīr (Ardashir) and Šābuhr (Shapur) II, the short-lived Macedonian and the following Seleucid empires are not mentioned. Thus, the absence of Alexander and his heirs in the accounts ascribed to the early Sasanians, and their presence within those pertaining to the Arsacids, may surprisingly be a means to validate the veracity of these assertions in spite of close parallels in structure and content among our classical texts.

Yet another piece of evidence could lend a helping hand to explain the dichotomy of the Hellenistic heritage in Arsacid and Sasanian Iran. Intriguingly, the divergence between the account of Tacitus and those of Dio/Herodian and Ammianus seems to mirror the contrast prevailing between Alexander as reflected in Middle Persian Zoroastrian writings, and Alexander in the Iranian national epic, the *Shahnameh*, that is, the dichotomy between Alexander's negative image in the Zoroastrian tradition as opposed to his favourable portrayal in the national epic.¹³ Among the Middle Persian passages reporting on the calamities that befell Iran following the Macedonian conquest is a succinct and well-known passage reported by the *Bundahishn*:

*pas andar xwadāyih ī Dārāy ī Dārāyān *Aleksandar Kēsar az Hrōm dwārist ō Ērānšahr āmad Dārāy ī šāh ōzad hamāg dūdag ī xwadāyān mēnōg-mardān ud paydāgān ud Ērānšahr abesihēnīd was marag ātaxš afsārd dēn ī māzdēsna Zand stad ō Hrōm frēstād Abestāg sōxt Ērānšahr pad 90 kōdag-xwadāy baxt.*¹⁴

"Thereafter, during the reign of Dārāy son of Dārāy, Alexander the Caesar moved from Rome (and) came to Iran. (He) killed King Dārāy, destroyed all the families of the lords, spiritual men, and illustrious people of Iran. He extinguished numerous fires, seized the *Zand* (Exegesis) of the Mazdean religion and sent it to Rome, burnt the Avesta, (and) divided Iran among 90 house-rulers."

In contrast, the *Shahnameh* reports how Alexander judiciously administered the Iranian lands by claiming the mytho-epic Kayanian heritage:

*Nebeštand nāme be har kešvarī,
be har nāmdār o har mehtarī
Az Eskandar-e Fīlqōs-e bozorg,
jahāngīr o bā kēne-jōyān sotorg,
benazd-e bozorgān-e sālārfaš,
delīrān-e asp-afgan-e kēne-keš,
sōy-e mōbadān, nāme-yī hamčōnēn
porr-afrozeš o pōzeš o āfrīn
sar-e nāme az pādšāh-e keyān
sōy-e kārđārān-e Īrānīyān*¹⁵

"They wrote letters to every province,
to all illustrious people and grandees,
from Alexander, son of Philip, the Great,
conqueror of the world, and stern with those
seeking revenge,
to the magi also a letter (was written),
full of brilliancy, repentance, and praise,
the letter head (being): 'from the Kayanian king
to all the leaders of the Iranians.'"

Surely, Alexander's favourable reception in the *Shahnameh* may be accounted for by the great popularity of the Alexander Romance in Sasanian Iran. Nonetheless, for it to be incorporated into Iranian oral literature, we still have to assume that a quiescent predisposition towards the assimilation of the Alexander Romance existed prior to the emergence of the Romance and its circulation in Iran.¹⁶

This predisposition may have been due to the acceptance by the Arsacids of the double heritage of Alexander and the Seleucids, as well as that of Cyrus and the Achaemenids. The appropriation of Alexander and his subsequent association with the Achaemenids in Arsacid ideology could therefore be reflected not only in Tacitus's account, but also in the oral traditions captured by the *Shahnameh*. Indeed, it seems that we may have to presume two co-existing traditions: a positive oral tradition, which, as Tacitus's account bears witness, could have been an Arsacid creation, and a later hostile written tradition that probably had cast a *damnatio memoriae* on Alexander under the early Sasanians.¹⁷ Thus, the presence of a positive Alexander image in the *Shahnameh*, which ultimately reflects his favourable image in the Arsacid period, in contrast to the hostile attitude of Zoroastrian writings in the Sasanian period, seems to mirror the difference between the account of Tacitus, in which the Arsacid Artabān (Artabanus) II legitimises his claim over disputed Roman territories by associating himself with both Alexander and Cyrus, and those of Dio/Herodian and Ammianus reporting on Ardaxšīr (Ardashir) and Šābuhr (Shapur) II, who exclusively mention their (Achaemenid) ancestors without any reference to the short-lived Macedonian and Seleucid empires.

Now, even if we were to presume that there was a kernel of truth in the report of Artabān's claim to the double heritage, we must still substantiate it by addressing how it came about.

The kingdoms of Pontus and Commagene

Prior to any *explicit* evidence for an Arsacid "Achaemenid revival," Mithridates VI Eupator was the first Iranian prince consciously to have emulated the Achaemenids, in parallel to his *imitatio Alexandri*, either as part of a political programme, which aimed at recovering parts of the Achaemenid dominions, or a mere propaganda tool destined to secure the allegiance of his Iranian subjects to his cause.¹⁸

If so, he may have provided the Arsacids with a source of inspiration, if not a model for direct emulation. As mentioned above, the Arsacids, by adopting the imperial title of “King of Kings” through Babylonian agency, stood in direct continuity with the great Achaemenids, although they may not yet have formulated the binary nature of their legitimacy.

There are certainly sundry indices that bear witness to Achaemenid reminiscences in ideological constructs of the Arsacid dynasty. Among the more striking are two reports attributed to Arrian’s *Parthica* that were captured by Photios and Synkellos respectively. The first is a variation on the theme/legend of the Seven,¹⁹ that is, the narratives of Dareios and the six noblemen who killed the magus Gaumāta, or the two usurper *magi*.²⁰ According to Photios’s note: Ἀρσάκης καὶ Τιριδάτης ἦσθιν ἀδελφῶ Ἀρσακίδαι “Arsaces and Tiridates were two brothers”, who were τοῦ υἱοῦ Ἀρσάκου τοῦ Φριαπίτου ἀπόγονοι “descendants of Arsaces, son of Phriapites”. Photios adds: τὸν ὑπὸ Ἀντιόχου σατράπην αὐτῶν τῆς χώρας καταστάντα Φερεκλέα, ἐπεὶ τὸν ἕτερον τῶν ἀδελφῶν αἰσχρῶς ἐπείρασε βιασάμενος “these brothers killed the satrap of their land, Pherekles, who had been appointed by King Antiochos (called Theos), because of the shameful act attempted on one of the brethren.” The brothers benefitted in this enterprise from the help of five accomplices (πέντε τὴν πρᾶξιν ἀνακοινωσάμενοι).²¹

Here, the eponymous founder Arsaces and his (fictive) brother Tiridates,²² together with their five helpers, are being depicted as leaders of an insurrection against the Seleucid satrap (called here Pherekles) of an undetermined land (ἡ χώρα),²³ which eventually would lead to Arsacid dominion in Parthia proper.

The first step in this evolution is the creation of an implicit association with the Achaemenids through the legend of the Seven. Thereupon follows an explicit reference to Achaemenid descent, which again comes from Arrian’s *Parthica*, but has been fortuitously preserved in Synkellos, and *caeteris paribus* could reflect the binary affiliation we have encountered above in Tacitus’s report. Indeed, Synkellos mentions that the brothers Arsaces and Teridates [sic], who were, on the one hand, *Macedonian* satraps under Antiochos Kallinikos, and on the other hand, descendants of the *Achaemenid* king Artaxerxes (II),²⁴ eventually killed the commander (*eparchos*) of Persis, a certain Agathokles,²⁵ for the same reasons as described in Photios’s narrative:

Ἀρσάκης τις καὶ Τιριδάτης ἀδελφοὶ τὸ γένος ἔλκοντες ἀπὸ τοῦ Περσῶν Ἀρταξέρξου ἐσατράπευον Βακτρίων ἐπὶ Ἀγαθοκλέους Μακεδόνης ἐπάρχου τῆς Περσικῆς.²⁶

“Arsaces and Teridates, two brothers who traced their lineage back to Artaxerxes, king of the Persians, ruled as satraps of the Bactrians when Agathokles of Macedonia was governor (eparch) of Persis.”

The theme of Arsaces, the eponym, being a Macedonian (or Seleucid) governor, rather than of Scythian descent, is not unique to Arrian’s account (assuming Synkellos has faithfully transmitted its content). As others have judiciously indicated before,²⁷ this had already been reported by Strabo. While ascribing Scythian origins to Parthians, he nonetheless captured an alternative tradition, according to which Arsaces was originally a Bactrian or a Macedonian of Bactria:²⁸ ἀπὸ τούτων δ’ οὖν ἔλκειν φασὶ τὸ γένος τὸν Ἀρσάκην οἱ δὲ Βακτριανὸν λέγουσιν αὐτόν,²⁹ “on that account, then, some say he [Arsaces] derives his lineage [from the Scythians], and others say he was a Bactrian”, who prompted Parthia to rebel.

It is therefore possible that we may possess in the excerpts ascribed to Arrian’s *Parthica* an unequivocal reference to Achaemenid forebears in the context of genealogical and ideological constructs, and furthermore that the reference to the Macedonian/Bactrian origins of the eponymous Arsaces might in kernel represent the binary nature of Arsacid legitimacy as we have seen it fully developed in Tacitus’s account (dating to the first century AD). The fact remains, however, that the *Parthica* belongs to the second century AD, and so the Achaemenid revival Arrian attributes to the earliest Arsacids may merely have been the result of his retrojecting well-established realities of his own time into earlier periods.

Another index of the early Arsacids’ Achaemenid reception is the apparent use of the Middle Iranian term *kāren*, written in Aramaic script, on some of the early issues of Arsaces I.³⁰ The term evidently derives from Old Persian **kārā-na-*,³¹ and is well attested in the *Nebenüberlieferung* as *κάρανος*, which is the title attributed to the supreme commander of Achaemenid forces in Asia Minor (mainly attested for Cyrus the Younger).³²

More recently, following the publication of the Aramaic documents from Achaemenid Bactria published by Naveh and Shaked, a certain *wš’t’p krny* “Hystaspes *krny*” has been identified in a note announcing – during year 1 of an unidentified ruler – the dispatch of some forty sheep to an Iranian superior (*‘l mr’y* “my lord”) called *wdywr*, made possibly by (an agent by the name of) *kwpdt*.³³ It is not easy to gauge whose first regnal year it is, although Ochus, Artaxerxes IV Arsēs, Dareios III, Bessos or Alexander are all possible candidates.³⁴ What the role of Hystaspes *krny* in this transaction might have been is difficult to determine. He could have been either the administrative official under whose authority the agent *kwpdt* was delivering the sheep, or else the seller. We know of a certain Hystaspes among the high Persian nobility on the eve of the Macedonian conquest, for Curtius describes him as *propinquus hic Darei fuerat*.³⁵ Curtius further reports that his wife was the grandchild of Artaxerxes III Ochus,³⁶ and probably the daughter of Bisthanēs, son of Ochus.³⁷ Still following Curtius, this Hystaspes was commander of a large army



Figures 2.1a and b: Obverse and reverse of drachm of Wahbarz, the *kâren* of Persis (After Klose & Mûseler 2008, p. 27, fig. 17).

(*magni et ipse exercitus praetor*);³⁸ and had probably taken part in the battle at Gaugamela, for his wife fell into captivity only following Dareios III's death.³⁹ Hystaspes, whom Arrian calls "the Bactrian" (Ὑστάσπης ὁ Βάκτριος) was appointed by Alexander commander (*hēgemōn*) of the Iranian noblemen who were admitted to the *agēma* of the *hetaîroi*,⁴⁰ another sign of his high aristocratic lineage.⁴¹

If this Hystaspes is the same as *wšt'sp krny*, then he might have been in Bactria, as Arrian's note suggests, prior to his appointment as *hēgemōn* of the *agēma* by Alexander, and consequently could not have been in Bactria during the first regnal year of either Bessos or Alexander, which leaves Ochus, Artaxerxes IV Arsēs and Dareios III as the candidates. Hystaspes' family ties with Ochus could suggest placing him in Bactria during his reign.

As to the word *krny*, it could certainly be the same word as the *κάρανος* we know from Asia Minor,⁴² or simply a family name, as Naveh and Shaked suggest.⁴³ It is true that the proposition that *krny* might reflect *κάρανος* resides primarily in our equating Hystaspes the Bactrian with *wšt'sp krny*, which is not unlikely but far from certain; and secondly, in assuming the function of *krny* was also attested in eastern Iran, for which this would be the only evidence. Again, the paucity of the material does not permit us to settle this one way or another.

In post-Achaemenid Iran, the title/name *kâren* is attested on the coinage of the local rulers of Persis, the *fratarakâ*.⁴⁴ On a Persid drachm – the authenticity of which has been contested⁴⁵ – which bears the name Wahbarz, the latter is depicted in Achaemenid dress finishing off a kneeling Greek foe (Fig. 2.1a/b).⁴⁶ The legend, which like those of other *fratarakâ* coins is split between three sides, distinguishes itself from other coins of Persis in that it introduces the title *kâren*. The legend, as suggested in our prior publication, reads: *Wahbarz wānēd/wānād ī kâren* "Wahbarz is/may be victorious, (he) who (is) the commander [*kâren*]."⁴⁷ This victorious Wahbarz, the *kâren*, might have been identical with a certain Oborzos (Ὀβόρζος), known from Polyaeus,⁴⁸ and said to have been in charge of 3,000 Greek military



Figure 2.2: Photo and line drawing of right vertical legend <krny> on drachm (reverse) of Wahbarz, the *kâren* of Persis (Detail of photo from Klose and Mûseler 2008, p. 27, fig. 17)



Figure 2.3: Photo and line drawing of left vertical legend <krny> on coin of Arsaces I (S 3.1–2; 4.1)

settlers, the *κατοίκοι*, whom he executed on suspicion of rebellion.⁴⁹ The special issue of Wahbarz/Oborzos, exhibiting the term *kâren*, could thus have commemorated his killing of the Greek *κατοίκοι*.

Whereas there is little doubt that the *kâren* (<krny>) refers to the Old Persian **kārā-na-*, an impression that is supported by the iconography of Wahbarz's special issue, the same may not be assumed *ipso facto* for the coins of Arsaces I, where the same word appears to occur. The series with the presumed word *kâren* <krny> follows Arsaces I's first issues, which carry on the reverse the legend Ἀρσάκου αὐτοκράτωρ in two vertical lines framing a seated archer.⁵⁰ The omission of αὐτοκράτωρ from the issues with <krny> has led some to believe that the presumed title *kâren* was a substitution for αὐτοκράτωρ.⁵¹ Given the exalted position of the Achaemenid *κάρανος*, *kâren* would be an appropriate rendition of the Seleucid term αὐτοκράτωρ, as well as providing validation for the hypothesis that the early Arsacids had sought to establish ideological links with the Achaemenids.

Indeed, a comparison of the legends of the Persid (Fig. 2.2) and Arsacid (Fig. 2.3) issues on which <krny> occurs seems to suggest that we are dealing with the same word.

Nevertheless, their semantic range may not have been identical. The word αὐτοκράτωρ was translated into Parthian early on (even though a precise date may be elusive), for which an exact calque, namely, *xwatāw* < *x^va-tāvaya- "self-reliant", not otherwise attested in Old Iranian, was fabricated.⁵² Although it is possible that the term αὐτοκράτωρ⁵³ might also have been rendered by the title *kâren*⁵⁴ – which basically signifies "leader of the people in arms/army" (*kāra-*) – the Arsacid creation of *xwatāw*/*wxatāw* to replicate the intrinsic meaning of αὐτοκράτωρ makes this assumption, at the very least, open to question, and forces us to ask whether *kâren* may indeed have been, in addition to the dynastic name Arsaces, a proper/family name.⁵⁵

Thus, in the period preceding the letter of Artabān (Artabanus) II, we have an array of indices testifying to the Arsacid engagement with their Achaemenid past, but we still cannot read into them the same degree of historical/ideological consciousness as manifest in Artabān's letter, and which we first encountered in Trogus's account of Eupator's policies, whose *Vorbildwirkung* for the Arsacids still remain valid.

But, how about the kingdom of Commagene?

In the first century BC, Antiochos I, son of Mithradates Kallinikos and the Seleucid princess Laodike, ruled over the Iranian and Hellenistic kingdom of Commagene. It is Antiochos I who was mainly responsible for the establishment of an intriguing form of Greco-Iranian religious idiosyncrasy.⁵⁶ This featured an impressive pantheon that in its final shape boasted: Zeus-Oromasdes; Apollo-Mithra-Helios-Hermes; Artagnes [*Warθrayn*]-Herakles-Ares; and the goddess Commagene. Antiochos I promulgated its *nomos*⁵⁷ and established throughout Commagene a network of major cultic spaces (*hierotheresia*) at Arsameia on the Euphrates, Arsameia on the Nymphaios and Nemrud Dağı, as well as more discreet *temenē*,⁵⁸ toward the celebration of the cult of the ancestors and/or the syncretized Irano-Hellenic divinities.

But of importance to us are the genealogical inscriptions, or fragments thereof, which were found on the site of the monumental terraces Antiochos I had built around a tumulus on the top of Nemrud Dağı, the highest mountain of the Antitaurus.⁵⁹

At Nemrud Dağı, Antiochos I erected on the eastern and western terraces colossal statues of the three Greco-Persian divinities he had fashioned, along with the goddess Commagene and his deified Self, which completed this illustrious pantheon. He furthermore set up two distinct rows of stelae on each of the terraces, with each single row projecting an *Ahnengalerie* on the maternal, as well as the paternal side.⁶⁰ Each stele represented a standing ancestor, and bore on the back a Greek inscription providing the titulary of Antiochos I and his ancestor's name and genealogy.⁶¹

The maternal *Ahnenreihe* (comprising some 17 stelae), on account of Antiochos I's mother, the Seleucid princess Laodike, was taken all the way back to Alexander the Great, and the paternal row (a mere 15 stelae) to Dareios the Great. Antiochos I had forged a genealogy that would place as the dynastic founder of his house a certain Aroandas [I] (= Orontes), a Persian nobleman, who had probably served as satrap of Armenia and later Mysia under Artaxerxes II in the fourth century BC⁶² – ancestor to another Aroandas [II], whom we know from the accounts of Alexander historians⁶³ – and who by virtue of being the husband of Rhodogune, daughter of Artaxerxes II, represented the link between the Commagenian and Achaemenid dynasties. The two inscriptions dedicated to Orontes [I], the sixth in the row of Persian forebears, from both the West and East terraces,

read as follows:

Orontes on the West Terrace

[β]ασιλεὺς μέγας Ἀντίοχος
Θεὸς Δίκαιος Ἐπιφανὴς Φιλο-
ρῶμαιος καὶ Φιλέλλην ὁ ἐγ-
βασ[ι]λέως Μιθραδάτου Καλλι-
νίκου καὶ βασιλίσσης Λαοδίκης
Θεᾶς Φιλαδέλφου

Ἀροάνδην Ἀρτασοῦρα τὸν
γαμήσαντα βασιλίσσαν
Ῥοδογούνην τὴν Ἀρταξέρξου
Θυγατέρα⁶⁴

Orontes on the West Terrace

“The great King Antiochus,
God, the Righteous, the Manifest,
friend
to Romans and Hellenes,⁶⁶ son of
King Mithradatēs Kallinikos (the
Victorious),
and Queen Laodikē, Goddess,
brother-loving,

Aroandas (Orontes), son of
Artasyras,
who married Queen
Rhodogune, daughter of
Artaxerxes [II].”

Orontes on the East Terrace

[βασιλεὺς μέ]γας Ἀντίοχ[ος]
[Θεὸς] Δίκ[αιος] Ἐπιφανής
[Φιλορῶμαιος κ]αὶ Φιλέ[λλην]
[ὁ] ἐγ[β]ασιλέως Μιθραδάτου]
Καλλινί[κου καὶ βα]σιλίσ[σης]
Λαοδίκης Θεᾶς Φιλαδέ[λφου]
τῆς ἐγ[β]ασιλέως Ἀντιό[χου]
Ἐπιφανοῦς Φιλομήτορ[ος]
Καλλινίκου

Ἀροάνδην Ἀρτασοῦρ[α τὸν]
γαμήσαντα βασιλίσσα[ν]
[Ῥο]δ[ο]γούνην τήν
βασ[ι]λέως]
[Βα]σιλέων μεγά[λου Ἀρτα-]
ξέρξου του κα[ὶ] Ἀρσάκου]
Θυγατέρα⁶⁵

Orontes on the East Terrace

“[The gr]eat [King] Antioch[us],
[God], the Right[eous], the Manifest,
[Friend to Romans a]nd Hellenes,
[son of King Mithradatēs]
Kallinik[os] (the Victorious), and
Q[uee[n] Laodikē, Goddess,
[brother-lo]ving,

who is the daughter of Antioch[us]
Epiphanēs Philomētōr (mother-
loving) Kallinikos,
Aroandas (Orontes), son of
Artasyr[as],
[who] married Quee[n]
[Rh]odogune, daughter of the ki[n]g
of [k]ings, the Gre[at Art]a-
xerxes [II], who is a[ls]o
Arsakēs.”

What is at first glance striking is that the royal forebear, Artaxerxes II, who in the Commagenian genealogical construct serves as a link to the Achaemenid house and Dareios I, fulfills this very function for the early Arsacids. If Synkellos's aforesaid notice⁶⁷ were to be trusted, then the ancestor to whom the brethren Arsaces and Teridates (Ἀρσάκης τις καὶ Τηριδάτης ἀδελφοὶ τὸ γένος ἔλκοντες ἀπὸ τοῦ Περσῶν Ἀρταξέρξου) referred would be the selfsame Artaxerxes II. One possible reason why the Arsacids may have chosen Artaxerxes as their Achaemenid ancestor *par excellence* may have resided in the latter's given name being Arsēs (< **Aršan-*), whose hypocoristic Arsaces (< **Aršaka-*) happened to be the patronymic of the Arsacid house. Artaxerxes II is indeed attested in the *Astronomical Diaries*, either under his given name Arsēs: *Aršu šarru* “king Arsēs”,⁶⁸ or with the use of both his given and throne names: [Ar]šu ša Artakšatsu šar mātāti šumšu nabû “[Ar]ses who is called Artaxerxes [II], king of the lands”.⁶⁹ Granted, Artaxerxes's preeminence in the Commagenian *Ahnenkult* owes to the *reported* marriage of his daughter Rhodogune with the eponymous Orontes, but if the reconstruction of the

final lines in the inscription dedicated to Orontes [I] were to be substantiated: [Po]δ[o]γούνην τήν βασ[ιλέως Βα]σιλέων μεγά[λου Ἀρτα]ξέρξου του κα[ὶ Ἀρσάκου] Θυγατέρα, “[Rho]dogune, daughter of the ki[ng of k]ings, the Gre[at Arta]xerxes [II], who is a[ls]o Arsakēs,” then we would have a formula known to us not only from Achaemenid Babylonia, as we have seen above, but also from the Mesopotamian literary tradition under Arsacid dominion.⁷⁰

Indeed, during the reigns of Gōdarz (Gotarzes) I (fall–winter? 91–*ante* early spring 79) and Urūd (Orodes) I (early spring 79–winter 76/75 [*a quo*]), the *Astronomical Diaries* make use for the first time after the Achaemenid period of formulae that are reminiscent of Achaemenid practices, and, as we have argued elsewhere,⁷¹ served the purpose of equating the neo-Iranian Arsacid empire with that of the Achaemenids:

Aršakâ/Aršakam (šarru/šar šarrāni) ša iṭṭarridu Gutarzâ/Urudâ (šarru)
Aršakâ šarru ša šumšu Gutarzâ

“Arsaces (king/king of kings) *who is called* Gōdarz/Urūd, (king)”

“Arsaces (king/king of kings) *whose name is* Gōdarz, (king)”

Thus, on the strength of this elusive token, it is possible guardedly to surmise that the use of a comparable formula in Commagene (βασ[ιλέως Βα]σιλέων μεγά[λου Ἀρτα]ξέρξου του κα[ὶ Ἀρσάκου] “ki[ng of k]ings, the Gre[at Arta]xerxes [II] *who is a[ls]o Arsakēs*”), if indeed this restoration of Orontes I’s stele proves tenable, may owe a debt to the impact of the Arsacid world, rather than being a testament to the direct Commagenian reception of Mesopotamian practices, as has been recently argued.⁷² Thus, if parallels in the use of formulae from Achaemenid Mesopotamia, reintroduced by Babylonian scholars under the early Arsacids, and possibly attested in Commagene, should prompt us to look for possible sources of influence, and the direction thereof, then it ought to be that of Arsacid Iran on Commagene in the restricted confines of this equation.

But could we expand this first conclusion to other ideological elaborations of the Orontids as well, and submit that their genealogical constructions, especially the binary reference to Dareios I and Alexander of Macedon – which in his *nomos* inscription at Nemrud Dağı, Antiochus I so exquisitely calls καθ’ ἃ παλαιὸς λόγος Περσῶν τε καὶ Ἑλλήνων ἐμοῦ γένους εὐτυχιστάτη ρίζα παραδέδωκε (“in so far as the ancient tale of the Persians and the Hellenes, *the most fortunate root of my ancestry*, has handed down [to us]”)⁷³ – could have been directly influenced by Arsacid practices. Or, alternatively, would it be conceivable that the Orontids themselves may have inspired the Arsacids in their allusion to the dual source of their ancestry? Before we may address this question, we should have a glance

at the epigraphic remains of Antiochus I’s ancestors. The first one belongs to Dareios I the Great, the first and most consequential of the Persian forebears:

*Dareios I on the West Terrace*⁷⁴

βασίλειος μέγας Ἀντίοχος
Θεὸς Δίκαιος Ἐπιφανής
Φιλορῶμιος καὶ Φιλέλλην
ὁ ἐγ βασίλειος Μιθραδάτου
Καλλινίκου καὶ βασιλίσσης
Λαοδίκης Θεᾶς Φιλαδέλφου

βασίλεια βασίλειον μέγαν
Δαρείου τὸν Ὑστάσπου⁷⁵

Dareios I on the West Terrace

“The great King Antiochus,
God, the Righteous, the Manifest,
Friend to Romans and Hellenes,
son of King Mithradatēs
Kallinikos (the Victorious), and
Queen
Laodikē, Goddess, Brother-loving.

King of Kings, the Great
Dareios, son of
Hystaspes.”

Alexander I on the West Terrace

Βα[σιλεὺς μέγας] Ἀ[ντί]οχος
[Θεὸς Δίκαιος Ἐπιφανής] [Φιλο-]
[ρῶμιος καὶ Φιλέ]λ[λ]η[ν] ὁ ἐγ
[βασίλειος Μιθραδάτου]
[Καλλινίκου καὶ βασι-]
[λίσσης Λαοδίκης Θεᾶς]
[Φιλαδέλφου τῆς ἐκ βασίλει-]
[ως Ἀντίοχου Ἐπιφανοῦς Φιλο-]
[μήτορος Καλ.]ιν[ίκου]
[βα]σιλέ[α] μέγ[αν Ἀλέ-]
ξανδρον τὸν [βασίλει-]
ως Φιλίππου⁷⁶

Alexander on the West Terrace

“The [great Ki]ng [A]ntiochos,
[God, the Righteous, the Manifest,
Friend]
[to Romans and Hellenes, son of]
[King Mithradatēs]
[Kallinikos (the Victorious), and
Queen]
[Laodikē, Goddess,]
[Brother-loving, daughter of King]
[Antiochus Epiphanes Philo-]
[mētōr (mother-loving) Kal]
lin[ikos].
[The [Gre]at [Ki]ng
[Ale]xander (or: the King, the
Great Alexander),⁷⁷ son
of [Kin]g Philip.”

Noteworthy, at least judging from the extant source material, is the absence of Cyrus within the framework of Commagenian elaborations,⁷⁸ whereas, as we have seen above, Cyrus is well anchored in the constructs of Pontic and Arsacid dynasts. The omission of Cyrus in Commagene is not surprising. The house of Commagene had established its legitimacy on the strength of its connection with the political order created by Dareios I and his six helpers (the Seven), who had eliminated in a daring *coup-d’état* Bardiya, son of Cyrus, the last scion of the Anšanite line in Persia.⁷⁹ With Dareios I a different house was to govern over Persian affairs, and hence it does not astound that the satraps of the new order, either descendants of, or claiming to derive from, the Seven, having eventually become dynasts in their own right, would deem Dareios I the source of their legitimacy, and their association with the Seven’s seizure of power as constitutive for their legitimacy.⁸⁰

In this light, it is the Pontic (and Arsacid) policy of including Cyrus that stands out and requires further explanation.⁸¹ There are sundry reports of the Mithridatids of Pontos having behaved like their Commagenian counterparts by alluding to the story of Dareios I and his six helpers. Indeed, Appian, while describing the origins of the house of Mithridates Eupator, mentions a certain Mithridates [I],

a scion of the Persian royal house (Μιθριδάτης ἀνὴρ γένους βασιλείου Περσικοῦ “Mithridates, a man of the Persian royal house”),⁸² as its founder. This Mithridates, thus continues the account, would eventually escape together with six horsemen from his overlord Antigonos (ὁ δ’ ἐξέφυγε σὺν ἰππεῦσιν ἕξ “he escaped together with six horsemen”), and in time establish his reign in Cappadocia and the adjacent countries.⁸³

Polybius reports the claim by another Pontic king, Mithridates II – whose daughter Laodike was Antiochus III’s wife⁸⁴ – to descend from the Seven who had killed the magus: ὁ δὲ Μιθριδάτης εὐχετο μὲν ἀπόγονος εἶναι τῶν ἐπὶ τὰ Περσῶν ἐνὸς τῶν ἐπανελομένων τὸν μάγον “Mithridates [II] boasted of being the descendant of one of the Seven who had killed the magus”. Polybius’s note is echoed a century later in Diodorus’s *Bibliotheca*, who recounts the same claim by Mithridates II: “There was also present with them Mithridates, the son of Ariobarzanes, and a descendant of one of the seven Persians who slew the Magian Smerdis, a man remarkable for courage and trained from childhood as a soldier.”⁸⁵

And for good measure, there is another note by Appian on the occasion of Mithridates Eupator’s demise, taking his ancestry back to Dareios, son of Hystaspes: καὶ ὁ Μιθριδάτης ἀπέθνησκειν ἐκκαιδέκατος ὦν ἐκ Δαρείου τοῦ Ὑστάσπου Περσῶν βασιλέως, “so died Mithridates who was the sixteenth descendant of Dareios, son of Hystaspes, king of the Persians.”⁸⁶

Aside from unequivocally substantiating Achaemenid pretenses by the Mithridatids throughout the centuries, these passages are also testimony to the prevalence of the legend of the Seven, and consequently of Dareios, in Pontic ideological constructs. Thus, whence the allusion to Cyrus, when, and for what purpose? Since it appears that before Mithridates Eupator, the house of Pontos like other Irano-Hellenistic rulers legitimised sovereign power by attaching the dynastic eponym to Dareios I’s line,⁸⁷ we have to locate the reason for the change of paradigm, from Dareios I to Cyrus, in the hegemonic aspirations of Eupator during the Mithridatic wars. Indeed, Eupator, who in his opposition to Rome sought a source of emulation to sustain the imperial design of his house, regarded the heroic figure of Cyrus – whose presence would create symmetry with the figure of the world conqueror Alexander – as a more formidable Persian forebear, of more consequent bearing upon Mithridates’s thrust to hegemonic grandeur in Asia Minor than Dareios I, who even in more remote antiquity was regarded as an administrator rather than an exalted victor.

It is thus possible that the binary structure of Pontic ideology forged prior to 89 BC, wherein Cyrus’s prestige had eclipsed Dareios’s pertinence, may have influenced the Arsacids, awaiting an opportune moment – when comparable pressures and stimuli in the Arsacid realm necessitated drawing back on the Cyrus symbolism – to express itself.

As far as the extant documentation permits judgment, we find the first *explicit* use of Cyrus in Arsacid ideological elaborations on the occasion of Artabān (Artabanus) II’s design on Armenia in the first half of the first century of the Common Era.

The Commagenian example, however, seems to have had little or no bearing on early Arsacid ideology, as Cyrus seems an elusive presence therein. It is, however, not excluded that Arsacid practices may have impacted Commagene, if we were to take into account the use, in the inscription dedicated to the Orontid eponym in Nemrud Dağı, of Artaxerxes II’s throne and given names, a practice reintroduced, after the Achaemenid period, on cuneiform documents of the Arsacid age, and attested for Gōdarz (Gotarzes) I and Urūd (Orodes) I for the years 90–87/86 and 80/79 BC respectively, thus a short period before the beginning of Antiochus I’s reign.

Notes

- 1 See Panitschek 1987.
- 2 See Shayegan 2011, with preliminary conclusions on p. 291–292.
- 3 On the Arsacid conquest of Babylonia, see Shayegan 2011, p. 67–72.
- 4 See Shayegan 2011, p. 42–44; 232–233; 394–409.
- 5 For the use of the title of “King of Kings” by Mithridates Eupator of Pontus and Tigranes II of Armenia, see Shayegan 2011, p. 228; 240–241; 244–245; 316–330.
- 6 See Shayegan 2011, p. 287–292.
- 7 On the Arsacid “Achaemenid Program,” see Panitschek 1990, p. 459–461; Wolski 1990a, p. 8–9; Wolski 1990b, p. 15; Wolski 1991, p. 53–55; Wolski 1993, p. 152–160; see also Dąbrowa 1983, p. 103–117, and Dąbrowa 2012b, p. 33–34; on Artabān (Artabanus) II’s letter, see Wiesehöfer 2005, p. 120; Fowler 2005, p. 125–155; also Shayegan 2011, p. 41–331.
- 8 Tac. *Ann.* 6.31.
- 9 Just. 38.7.
- 10 On this question, see Shayegan 2004 [2008].
- 11 Cass. Dio 80.3.4.
- 12 Amm. Marc. 17.5.5.
- 13 On the entire dossier of the Alexander reception in pre- and early Islamic Iran, see Briant 2003, p. 443–521; and now authoritatively Wiesehöfer 2011, p. 124–128 (negative image), and 128–131 (positive image), especially 125–126, where the author describes the historical circumstances that may have caused the negative reception of Alexander already in Iranian antiquity: “No, the emergence and the broad and enduring effect of the negative Alexander-image may only be understood, if the Zoroastrian allegations, despite all exaggerations and elaborations, could be substantiated by the historical fact of atrocities committed by Alexander in Iran. This does not mean that the concrete allegations had to have their respective origin in Alexander’s own time; it only means that the image of Alexander as evildoer had to have arisen in Zoroastrian circles in Iran during his lifetime.” For the reason behind the positive appraisal of Alexander in Iran, see still

- Frye 1985, p. 187–188. For further literature, see Shayegan 2011, p. 295–307.
- 14 *Bundahishn* 33.14, ed. Pakzad 2005.
- 15 Khaleghi-Motlagh 1997, 562, ll. 415–419.
- 16 On the Alexander romance in Iran, see discussion in Shayegan 2011, p. 304–305, n. 866, with ample literature.
- 17 See Frye 1985, p. 187–188: “More likely is the folkloric tendency to assimilate Alexander to the Iranian national tradition, such that one may postulate two Iranian traditions side by side, one of folklore which made Alexander a scion of the Achaemenid kings and an Iranian hero, while the priestly tradition maintained the historic picture of Alexander as the destroyer of not only the Iranian kingdoms, but also of the Iranian culture and sacred writings.” Also Wiesehöfer 2011, 123–124.
- 18 On ideological exchanges between Eupator and Arsacid Iran, see Shayegan 2011, p. 307–311, with further literature; also more recently Olbrycht 2009; and McGing 2009; on the Roman association of Mithridates with Xerxes, see now Ballesteros Pastor, 2011.
- 19 On the seven conspirators who plotted against the alleged magus Gaumāta – that is, Dareios and his six helpers, who in time would become the heads of the most powerful families within the empire – see Briant 1996, p. 119–127, 140–149. More recently, see Shayegan 2012, p. 127–138.
- 20 See Frye 1984, p. 206; also Wolski 1993, p. 56.
- 21 Photios 58: Ἀρσάκης καὶ Τιριδάτης ἦσθιν ἀδελφὸν Ἀρσακίδα, τοῦ υἱοῦ Ἀρσάκου τοῦ Φριαπίτου ἀπόγονοι. Οὗτοι Φερεκλέα τὸν ὑπὸ Ἀντιόχου τοῦ βασιλέως (θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐπικλὴν ὠνόμαζον), ἀλλ’ οἱ γε Ἀρσακίδα τὸν ὑπὸ Ἀντιόχου σατράπην αὐτῶν τῆς χώρας καταστάντα Φερεκλέα, ἐπεὶ τὸν ἕτερον τῶν ἀδελφῶν αἰσχροῦς ἐπείρασε βιασάμενος, οὐκ ἐνεγκόντες τὴν ὕβριν ἀνεῖλόν τε τὸν ὑβρίσαντα, καὶ ἐτέροις πέντε τὴν πρᾶξιν ἀνακοινωσάμενοι καὶ τὸ ἔθνος Μακεδόνων ἀπέστησαν, καὶ καθ’ ἑαυτοὺς ἦρξαν, καὶ ἐπὶ μέγα δυνάμει ἤλασαν, ὥς καὶ Ῥωμαίοις ἀντιρρόπους μάχας θέσθαι, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ μεθ’ ἑαυτῶν τὴν νίκην ἔχοντας τοῦ πολέμου ἀπελθεῖν. See Henry 1959, I, [17a]:34–[17b]:5.
- 22 On the elusive Tiridates, see already Wolski 1979, p. 67–74; Wolski 1993, p. 56, n. 7; and Wiesehöfer 1996, p. 131–132; and Dąbrowa 2012a, p. 169; also Dąbrowa 2012b, p. 27.
- 23 Already Bevan 1902 II, p. 286: “Of what province, however, Pherecles was satrap the abstract of Arrian given by Photios does not specify; we may presume he was really eparch or hyparch of the district in which Asaak was situated.”
- 24 On possible reasons for the Arsacid choice of Artaxerxes (II) as the Achaemenid ancestor *par excellence*, see below p. 13f.
- 25 See also Lerner 1999, p. 18–31.
- 26 Synkellos 539; see Mosshammer 1984, 343, ll. 7–9.
- 27 See Wolski 1993, p. 55–57; and Wiesehöfer 1996, p. 130–132.
- 28 Since this version suppresses the role of the Macedonian satrap of Parthia Andragoras (of whom, among others, Justin [41.41.5–9] knows to report), who is superseded by Arsaces, we may assume that Βακτριανός actually referred to a Macedonian settler of Bactria.
- 29 Str. 11.9.3.
- 30 See Sellwood 1980, types 3.1–2 and 4.1; also Alram 1986, 122–123.
- 31 *Kāren* <kry> is attested both in Parthian Nisa documents as <kryn> and in Sasanian inscriptions with the same spelling (and <k’lry>). It most likely derives from **kārā-na-* (with *-(h)no- the “Führer-Suffix”) (Haebler 1982, 81–90; Rix 1982, 76; and Schmitt 2002, 58n48), and may be read either **kārān* (<**kāra-Hna-*), or more likely *kāren* (<**kāra-na-*), in western Middle Iranian, although the ambiguity of the Aramaic script permits either reading. For further reading, see Shayegan 2011, p. 170, n. 533.
- 32 See Shayegan 2011, p. 176, n. 552.
- 33 *Kwpdt* is related to Parthian *Kōfzāt* <**kaufa-zāta* “born to the mountain”. The expected Old Persian form of *zan-/zā-* (<**janH-/jH-*) “give birth; procreate”, namely, *dan-/dā-* had been hitherto only attested in the Elamite *Nebenüberlieferung*; other cognates of *zan-*, such as **zana-* “people; race” (e.g., *vispa-zana-*; *paru-zana-*), are well attested in royal inscriptions.
- 34 For the text of (reproduced below), and commentary on, C2, see Naveh and Shaked 2012, p. 187–191:
- Inside:*
C2: 1 bšnt 1 wšt’sp krny ’zgm’ mn kwpdt npq qn
C2: 2 ’l mr’y wdywr qn 40
Outside:
C2: 3 kwpdt
Translation
Inside:
1: In the year 1. Vishtaspa Karanya. The disbursement from Kaufadāta: sheep came out
2: to my lord Vaidyura, 40 sheep.
Outside:
3: Kaufadāta.
- 35 Curt. 6.2.7.
- 36 Ibid.: “Ergo interrogata quanam esset, neptim se Ochi qui nuper regnasset in Persis filio eius genitam esse respondit, uxorem Hystaspis fuisse.”
- 37 Arr. 3.19.4.
- 38 Curt. 6.2.7.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Arr. 7.6.5.
- 41 On Hystaspes, see also Shayegan 2007 [2012], p. 109.
- 42 Compare now Hyland 2013.
- 43 Naveh and Shaked 2012, p. 191: “The full name given here, **wšt’sp krny**, suggests that the Vishtaspa in question belongs to a family well known in later Iranian history, that of *Kāren*.”
- 44 On this episode and more descriptions, see Shayegan 2011, p. 168–178. On the *fratrakā* and early rulers of Persis, see Wiesehöfer 1994; Wiesehöfer 1998, p. 36–37; Wiesehöfer 2007, p. 37–49; and Wiesehöfer 2011b, which proposes a late dating of the rulers of Persis, and following Hoover 2008, p. 213–215, offers a new sequencing of the *fratarakā* rulers, to which we subscribe: Ardashahr, Wahbarz, Baydād, Wādfradād I, and Wādfradād II. For another recent study with a late dating (published prior to Hoover’s novel sequencing), encompassing a thorough discussion of the archaeological, epigraphic and literary material, see Callieri 2007, p. 115–146. For an early dating, compare the excellent study of Sarkhosh Curtis 2010, p. 379–394, who synthesises the findings of Hoover 2008, and Klose and Müsseler 2008. Also favouring

- an early dating of the *fratarakā* are Hoover 2008, p. 213–215; Klose 2005, p. 93–103; and Klose and Müsseler 2008, p. 11, 15; the works by Klose and Müsseler that precede that of Hoover still subscribe to the traditional regnal sequence. See also Panaino 2003, p. 265–268. On the titulature of the *fratarakā* and their successors in Persis, the *Dāryānids*, see Shayegan 2005 [2009], p. 169–171.
- 45 See Alram 1987, p. 154; and most recently *apud* Wiesehöfer 2013, p. 723.
- 46 See Alram 1987, p. 147, 150; Bivar 1998, p. 39–40, figs. 25a/b and 26a/b; and Klose and Müsseler 2008, p. 27, figs. 17 and 18.
- 47 See Shayegan 2011, p. 170.
- 48 Polyæn. 7.40.
- 49 See Wiesehöfer 1994, p. 110; Wiesehöfer 2007, p. 39; Callieri 2007, p. 117; and Wiesehöfer 2011b, p. 113–114.
- 50 See Sellwood 1980, types 1–2; Alram 1986, 122–123; Sarkhosh Curtis 2007, 8; see also Weber 2010, 634–635.
- 51 Compare more recently Sinisi 2012, p. 280, who erroneously states the Middle Iranian term *kāren* written in Aramaic script was “the Aramaic equivalent of *autokrator*”; and Rezakhani 2013, p. 767. See also Weber 2010, p. 634–635.
- 52 See still Meillet 1911, p. 109–112: “On est donc conduit à se demander si les Parthes de l’époque arsacide n’auraient pas calqué sur le grec [αὐτοκράτωρ] un mot nouveau”; also Shayegan 1998, p. 32.
- 53 On the use of αὐτοκράτωρ among the Seleucids, a case in point is the usurper commander Tryphon, who systematically used the title (βασιλέως Τρύφωνος αὐτοκράτορος) on his coins from Antioch and Phoenicia; see de Callatay and Lorber 2011, p. 425.
- 54 Compare recently Olbrycht 2011, p. 229–231, and 240.
- 55 For the use of the proper name *kāren* on the Nisa Ostraca, see Schmitt 1998, p. 187, no. 30. See also the use of *kāren* in Sasanian inscriptions, such as *Pērōz Kāren* (ŠKZ, Pth., 23); *Gōk Kāren* (ŠKZ, Pth., 24); *Ardaxšahr Kāren* (ŠKZ, Pth., 26), that is, “Pērōz (from the house of) Kāren,” “Gōk (from the house of) Kāren,” and “Ardaxšahr (from the house of) Kāren.”
- 56 On the importance of the Iranian element in the Commagenian syncretism, as the end-point of an evolutionary process, whose beginnings suggest Antiochos I’s cultic conception to have been solidly anchored in Greek conceptions – attested by Antiochos I’s stele (and inscription) at Sofraz Köy depicting him solely with Apollo Epēkoos; over syncretic forms at the τέμενος sites of Zeugma and Samosata, where Zeus-Oromasdēs and Mithra-Helios-Apollo-Hermes are attested (at Zeugma, Apollo is depicted in the Greek fashion, nude; Crowther and Facella 2003, p. 65; Crowther 2003, p. 66), as well as at the ἱεροθέσιον of Arsameia on the Nymphaios, where we encounter the amalgamated Mithra-Helios-Apollo-Hermes shown in Iranian accoutrement; to the fully evolved syncretism of Nemrud Dağı – see Jacobs 2002a; also Crowther and Facella 2003, p. 62–65; compare also Messerschmidt 2011, p. 296–304; in particular, 302–304, who, while conceding to the presence of the Iranian element in the Commagenian cult, is intent on de-emphasising it, and argues for a reevaluation of the pre-Persian “autochthonous” cultic forms of the region(s), such as the Hittite, as sources of inspiration for Antiochos I: “Die Versuche, an existierende Kulte anzuknüpfen, werfen die Frage auf, ob nicht vorgriechische wie nichtiranische Traditionen, die in der religiösen Vorstellungswelt des südostanatolischen Raumes verwurzelt sind, bei der Konzipierung der kommagenischen Herrschervergöttlichung und Ahnenverehrung eine wesentlich größere Rolle spielten als lange Zeit angenommen wurde.” Similarly, see Crowther and Facella 2003, p. 65; for other regional cults in the Commagene, see Schütte-Maischatz 2003. For Hittite parallels, still Börker-Klähn, especially 56–357. Arguing for the impact of Iranian traditions, among others by contrasting the tenor of Old Persian epigraphy with that of Commagenian inscriptions, see still Petroff 1998; and more recently the excellent pages of Panaino 2007.
- 57 On the *nomos* inscription at Nemrud Dağı, see Dörner and Young 1996, p. 207–217; on the remains of the *nomos* text from the temenos site at Samosata, see Crowther and Facella 2011; and Crowther and Facella 2003, p. 68–70; for the inscriptions of the *temenē* at Zeugma and Sofraz Köy, see Crowther and Facella 2003, p. 44–61, and 71–74; and Crowther 2003 (Zeugma); for the temenos site at Ancoz, see Wagner and Petzl 2003.
- 58 On the Commagenian ruler cult, and the distribution of the *hierotheresia* (ἱεροθέσια) and *temenē* (τέμενη), see Wagner 2012, especially p. 46–47; and Wagner 1983; on Antiochos I’s religious policy, and his binary (Greek/Persian) syncretistic religious system being not only a response to the particular power constellation, which followed upon the new order established by Pompey in the East – with Armenia reduced to a Roman vassal state, and Commagene entangled between the Arsacid and Roman empires – but also as a means to introduce equilibrium into the relations of Macedonian and Persian constituencies in Commagene itself, see Jacobs 2012b, especially p. 107: “Vielmehr dürfte der ‘östlicher’ Bezug, der ... an Bedeutung gewann ... innenpolitische Gründe gehabt haben. Anlass mag insbesondere ein Konkurrenzverhältnis innerhalb der kommagenischen Gesellschaft zwischen alteingesessener Oberschicht und den Nachkommen der makedonischen Eroberer gewesen sein, dem durch ein einseitig griechisch geprägtes Repräsentationsprogramm eher eine Verschärfung drohte.” Also Mittag 2011, especially p. 150–160, whose exciting and careful analysis of the terminology used of honours for the gods, ancestors, and Antiochos I shows the limits of Antiochos I’s dynastic cult: although these honours introduced the ruler into the sphere of the divine as a privileged interlocutor and partner of the gods, they still refrained from equating him with the divine essence. In this, the Commagenian cult, although indebted to Hellenistic precedents, nonetheless distinguishes itself from them, mainly in its reluctance to cross over wholly into the divine sphere. In this one might be tempted to recognise the sway of the Iranian element: “Deutlich wird, dass die Vorfahren immer stärker in die göttliche Sphäre gerückt werden und dass der König selbst eine größere Nähe zu den Göttern sucht, aber zu keinem Zeitpunkt selbst zum Gott wird. Beide Entwicklungen stehen in der Tradition hellenistischer Herrscher- und Dynastiekulte ... Im religiösen Kern bleiben sie aber letztlich bis zum Schluss iranisch-persische Vorstellungen”; Mittag 2011, p. 160.
- 59 On Nemrud Dağı, its topography, review of the

- Forschungsgeschichte*, survey of past excavations, architecture, sculptures and epigraphic remains, see Sanders 1996; also Jacobs 2012a; Facella 2006, p. 261–270.
- 60 For a succinct review of the construction policy of Antiochos I (and Mithradates II), see Jacobs 2012a, p. 77–86; also Jacobs 2003, especially p. 120, who argues that Antiochos might have striven to lend a cultural identity to the nascent Commagenian polity on the Euphrates with the help of monumental sculptures within a region, where such tradition has been indigenous, and hence a predisposition for its receptivity was present.
- 61 For a discussion of (the epigraphic evidence on) the *Ahnengalerie* at Nemrud Dağı, see Messerschmidt 2012, p. 87–98; Facella 2006, p. 270–279; Facella 2009, p. 379–392; Dörner and Young 1996, p. 254–355; Dörner 1996, p. 361–377; Jacobs 2002b, especially p. 83–85, and 87, where the author rightly suggests that the *Ahnengalerie* was not originally part of Nemrud Dağı’s holistic composition, but would acquire in time, in particular as it eventually encompassed contemporaneous family members, a more pronounced biographical dimension: “Im Verlauf der Arbeiten am Heiligtum rückte der gleichsam biographische Charakter des Programms deutlicher in den Vordergrund. Das ursprüngliche Vorhaben, die Vorfahren abzubilden, wurde dahingehend abgewandelt, daß Antiochos Verwandte und schließlich sogar lebende Familienangehörige abbilden ließ.” On the women in the *Ahnengalerie*, especially on the maternal side, see Jacobs 2000, p. 297–306.
- 62 On this Orontes (I), see Facella 2006, 95–135; Facella 2009, 388–389; Dörner and Young 1996, 261–263; Dörner 1996, 364–366.
- 63 This Orontes (II) was a Persian nobleman who along with Mithraustes led the Armenian contingent at Gaugamela (Arr. 3.8.5), attached to the right wing (Arr. 3.11.7). Whether he is the same Orontes who held the satrapy of Armenia (and was a friend of Peukestes, satrap of Persis), and whom Diodorus mentions (ή δ’ ἐπιστολή ... ἀπέσταλτο παρὰ Ὀρόντου τοῦ σατραπείαν μὲν ἔχοντος Ἀρμενίας φίλου δὲ ὄντος Πευκέστη “a letter ... was sent by Orontes, who held the satrapy of Armenia, and was a friend of Peukestes”; D.S. 19.23.3; see also Polyæn. 4.8.3) remains uncertain. See Messerschmidt 2012, p. 91, who seems to identify this Orontes [II] with the one ruling over the Armenian satrapy in the aftermath of Alexander’s demise: “Nach der Niederlage des Dareios konnte sich Orontes in Armenian behaupten ... 317 v. Chr. wird er als Satrap – nicht König – von Armenien und freund des Peukestas ... erwähnt.” Undecided Facella 2006, p. 139: “Se si vuole infatti identificare questo Orontes con quello di Gaugamela, è necessario presupporre o che Orontes II sia figlio di Orontes I ... oppure che Orontes II fosse nipote del satrapo.” Strabo (Str. 11.531) also knows of a certain Orontes, the descendant of Hydarnes, one of the Seven (Ὀρόντης ἀπόγονος Ὑδάρνου τῶν ἐπτὰ Περσῶν ἐνός), identical with the Herodotean Intaphernes (Her. 3.70–71), in Armenia. This evidence taken together with the account of his command over the Armenian contingent at Gaugamela may support the hypothesis of him having been the satrap of Armenia.
- 64 Dörner and Young 1996, p. 294. Also Facella 2006, p. 95–96; and Facella 2009, p. 388.
- 65 Dörner and Young 1996, p. 261. Also Facella 2006, p. 96; and Facella 2009, p. 388.
- 66 For an excellent discussion of the evolving meaning of Φιλορόματος καὶ Φιλέλλην during the reigns of Antiochos I and Antiochos IV, as well as the reality of these conceptions in light of changing political exigencies, see Facella 2005, p. 87–103; also Facella 2010, especially p. 182–186.
- 67 See above, p. 11.
- 68 See Sachs and Hunger 1988, I, no. –384 lower edge 1² (70–71); no. –382 right edge 1–2 (76–77); no. –381 A upper edge 1² (80–81).
- 69 See Hunger and van der Spek 2006, no. –362 obv. 1, rev. 9² (= 3–7). This particular diary, recently dated by the authors to 29.xi.–28.xii.363 BCE (month ix of year 42 of Arsēs), was not originally included by Hunger in the edition of the *Astronomical Diaries*. On the names Arsaces and Arsēs, see Schmitt 2011, nos. 50 and 53.
- 70 See already Facella 2009, p. 387, n. 33.
- 71 Shayegan 2011, p. 291–292.
- 72 Compare Facella 2009, p. 386–387: “The possibility that Babylonian tradition was reflected in shaping the succession line of Antiochos’ Achaemenid ancestors is not so remote, when considering the influence Babylonian culture might have had on the astronomical astrologers and in general intellectuals of the Commagenian royal court.”
- 73 See Dörner and Young 1996, 208, N 28–31.
- 74 See also the severely damaged inscription dedicated to Xerxes (Dörner and Young 1996, p. 285; also Facella 2006, p. 88–89):
- [βασ]ιλὲς μέγα[ς Ἀ]ντίοχος
[Θεὸς] Δίκαιος Ἐ[πιφ]ανής
[Φι]λορόματος καὶ [Φι]λέλλην
[ὁ ἐγ βα]σιλέως [Μιθ]ραδάτου
[Καλλ]ινίκου καὶ [βα]σιλίσ[σ]ης
[Λαοδ]ίκης Θε[ᾶς] Φιλαδέλφου
[βασιλ]έ[α] β[ασιλέων] μέ[γα]ν
[Ξε]ρξην τὸν ἐγ βασιλέως
[βασιλέων] μέγαλου Δαρείου
- 75 Dörner and Young 1996, 282; also Facella 2006, 87.
- 76 Dörner and Young 1996, 323.
- 77 For a discussion on how to translate Alexander’s title: [βα]σιλέ[α] μέγα[ν Ἀλέ]ξανδρον τὸν, namely as “the Great King Alexander,” or “King, the Great Alexander,” see Dörner and Young 1996, p. 324–325.
- 78 See already Panitschek 1987, p. 81.
- 79 On more recent interpretations of Cyrus’ Anšante lineage, resulting from Elamite and Persian acculturation, in contrast to Dareios I’s Achaemenid house, see the excellent articles of Waters 2004; Potts 2005; Henkelman 2011.
- 80 See also Panitschek 1987, p. 80.
- 81 It is worthwhile mentioning that according to Diodorus (31.19.1), Cappadocian rulers also seem to have derived their ancestry from the Seven and indirectly also from Cyrus – Ὅτι λέγουσιν ἑαυτοὺς οἱ τῆς Καππαδοκίας βασιλεῖς εἰς Κῦρον ἀναφέρειν τὸ γένος τὸν ἐν Πέρσῃς διαβεβαίοντα δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐπτὰ Περσῶν τῶν τὸν μάγον ἐπανελομένων ἐνός

ὑπάρχειν ἀπόγονοι “the kings of Cappadocia say that they take their ancestry back to Cyrus, and also maintain strongly that they are descendants of the seven Persians who took on the magus” – but, intriguingly their desire for anteriority to legitimise their rule in Cappadocia reaches back to the time preceding Cyrus and the Persian empire, for as Diodorus further recounts Cappadocians claim to be from the seed of Cyrus’s aunt, Atossa, daughter of Cambyses, father of Cyrus the Great. Thus, although this genealogical construct provides indubitable anteriority, by bypassing and transcending the founder of the Persian empire, it fails to claim Cyrus as a direct ancestor.

82 App. *Mith.* 9.

83 *Ibid.*

84 Plb. 5.43.1–4.

85 D.S. 19.40.2.

86 App. *Mith.* 112.

87 See Panitschek 1987, p. 78: “Die überwiegende Mehrzahl der Pontos betreffenden Quellen berichtet von einem engen Zusammenhang zwischen der Beseitigung des ‘falschen Smerdis’ durch die Sieben Perser und der Einsetzung des Ahns der Dynastie.”

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Dynastic Connections in the Arsacid Empire and the Origins of the House of Sāsān

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Sinatrucids versus Artabanids

In the history of later Parthia there were many branches of the Arsacids, descended from various kings and close relatives of kings who were high up in the hierarchy. The House of Arsaces was broad and ramified enough to be troubled by a multitude of internal conflicts. Moreover, the power of the Arsacids was dependent on great aristocratic clans.¹ The aim of this study is to analyse the causes and results of the conflicts between different branches of the Arsacids, especially between the scions of Sinatruces in the male line and the so-called Younger Arsacids stemming from Artabanus II (8/9–39/40 AD). These conflicts had important consequences for Arsacid history, including the emergence of the Indo-Parthian dynasty. I shall show that the rise of the House of Sāsān in Iran resulted mainly from internal Parthian struggles.

The predominant Arsacid branch on the Parthian throne in the first century BC (from 78/77 BC to 11/12 AD) was the line descended from Sinatruces, known as the Sinatrucids. This line ousted another group of Arsacids with a claim to power, the descendants of Mithradates II the Great (122–87 BC).² Sinatruces was eighty when he ascended the throne;³ hence he must have been born around 158 BC, in the reign of Mithradates I (165–132 BC).⁴ Presumably he was one of Mithradates I's sons. His accession created a singular situation, since it blocked the succession of the much younger line descended from Mithradates II. Thus it is not surprising that some Arsacid princes challenged the Sinatrucid claim to the throne and that pretenders like Tiridates I and Mithradates IV appeared, who tried to depose Phraates IV.⁵ The anti-Sinatrucid opposition managed to depose Phraataces (Phraates V).⁶

The Sinatrucid line was marked by a strong parricidal and fratricidal inclination. Phraates III was murdered by his

sons, Mithradates III and Orodes II. The latter, supported by the Sūrēn clan, murdered his brother, and then, following the Parthian victory at Carrhae (53 BC), had his ally Sūrēn executed. Then Orodes II was probably murdered by his son Phraates IV, who eliminated his numerous brothers to secure the throne.⁷ Thus rivalry between sons to succeed their father the king was a common problem in Parthia in the first century BC and later on.

The assassination of Orodes II sparked a series of conflicts, inevitably leading to a change in the balance of power within Parthia itself. Orodes II's reign had been relatively stable, as evidenced by frequent Parthian engagement in offensive warfare against Rome from 51–38 BC. After the execution of Surenas (Sūrēn), Orodes II managed to neutralise the powerful Sūrēn clan, but there must have been a strong residual hostility left. The death of Pacorus, the heir to the throne, in 38 BC, shook Parthian affairs. It cannot be ruled out that the force behind the rapid rise to power of Phraates IV in 38–37 BC was the Sūrēn clan, which wanted to restore its former strength and influence and made use of the crisis of the monarchy. But Phraates IV's coronation was met with defiance by many of the Parthian clans and vassals.

In the reign of Phraates IV the conflict within the Parthian elite was already firmly established and in the opening decades of the first century AD led to the crystallisation of three main factions: the "legitimists" along with the Sūrēn and part of the Kārin clan, who supported the descendants of Phraates IV; the Median-Atropatenian faction; and the Dahian-Hyrcanian faction. The two latter groups were united for a time, rallying in their support of Artabanus II against the Phraatids.⁸ In his domestic policy Phraates IV was extremely cruel to his relatives and made sudden dynastic changes, such as the appointment of Phraataces as his heir, which caused commotion in the Parthian empire.

His reign was ended by a *coup d'état* carried out by his son Phraataces (3/2 BC–4 AD) and his consort Musa. When there were no more descendants of Sinatruces left in Parthia itself following the deposition of Phraataces, the adherents of this line embarked on bringing back those Sinatruceids who were living in Rome. It was to this faction, which I call the Phraatids (in that it united the supporters of the House of Phraates IV), that the powerful clans of Kārin and Sūrēn belonged.

The aftermath of the struggle between Vonones I, the last Sinatruceid of any significance in western Parthia, and Artabanus II (8/9–39/40 AD), was to prove critical for the Imperium Parthicum. The fall of the Sinatruceid line, a branch of the Arsacid dynasty, marked an important caesura in the history of the Parthian empire. Artabanus II fought for the throne of Parthia against the descendants of Phraates IV in the male line: Vonones I, Phraates (VI) and Tiridates II.

Artabanus's reign marked the coming to power of a rival branch of the Arsacids, descended most probably from Mithradates II through the male line.⁹ The Artabanids (8/9–51 AD) and the monarchs descended from Artabanus II's brother Vonones, conventionally known as the House of Vologases I or the Vologasids (51–226 AD), restored Parthia to the status of a great power. These two lines make up the Younger Arsacids.¹⁰

The fall of the Sinatruceids in Parthia and the rise to power of Artabanus II and his dynastic branch of the Arsacids led to a change in the balance of power in the Parthian empire. Meanwhile the Sinatruceids split off the eastern satrapies of Sakastan, Drangiana and Arachosia from the Younger Arsacid state and set up their own Indo-Parthian kingdom. Their ruling dynasty, named the Gondopharids after its founder, enjoyed the support of the Parthian Sūrēn clan and part of the Kārin clan.

Gondophares and the Indo-Parthian ruling house

In 19 AD when the Romans killed the Sinatruceid ruler Vonones I and revoked their support for the Sinatruceids,¹¹ the split in the Parthian ruling class became obvious. The death of Vonones meant the inevitable supremacy of Artabanus II in the Imperium Parthicum. At this time, around 20 AD, a certain Gondophares declared himself king in the eastern Parthian satrapies of the territory of Sakastan, Drangiana and Arachosia, what we now call Indo-Parthia. The concurrence of these events was probably not a coincidence. The dates of Gondophares' reign – c. 20–50 AD – have been established on the basis of the Takht-i Bahi inscription and references in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*.¹² We know of Gondophares chiefly from his coinage.¹³ He availed himself of bombastic titles: “Great King of Kings” (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΣ), and “Autokrator” (ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΩΡ), or “Self-appointed”, an epithet applied to an individual who exercised absolute power, unrestrained by superiors.¹⁴

The coins of Gondophares that show him wearing a diadem allude overtly to western Arsacid issues. Their reverse presents the monarch seated on his throne with Nike crowning him. The title “Autokrator” and the figure of Nike imply that Gondophares must have proclaimed himself king in defiance of an enemy, and most probably one of the enemies in question was Artabanus II. The title “Great King of Kings” suggests that he saw himself as the equal of the Artabanids.

“Gondophares” passed into the title used by the rulers of Indo-Parthia, just like the honorific Arsaces in Parthia and Augustus in Rome. Similarly, the *tamga* 𐭅 became a dynastic mintmark on Gondopharid coinage.¹⁵ This so-called Gondopharid symbol occurred on coins in the eastern marches of Parthia in the first century BC. It was used as a countermark on Parthian issues and their imitations in Bactria and perhaps in neighbouring areas. In particular, it occurs on the coins of Orodes II and Phraates IV.¹⁶ Later on it appears on the Firuzabad relief of the Sasanian king Ardashir I, where it decorates the caparison of the horse of a prince accompanying Ardashir.¹⁷

There is a particular group of coins attributed to Gondophares, consisting of drachms of typical Arsacid format. On the obverse there appears a royal portrait with a high tiara, while the reverse depicts the ruler being crowned by Nike, and gives his name and titles. One of the legends reads: “Great King of Kings Hyndopherres, who is surnamed Sā[s]e”¹⁸ (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΣ ΥΝΔΟΦΕΡΡΗΣ Ο ΕΠΙΝΟΜΑΖΟΜΕΝΟΣ ΣΑ[Σ]Η). The decipherment of the name Sāse, or Sāses, allows us to conclude that Gondophares' personal name was Sāses.¹⁹ Among Gondophares' successors was a ruler called Sāses.²⁰ The Indo-Parthian name Sāses, attested as the surname of Gondophares, contains the same core element as the Parthian name Sāsān. In Sanskrit the genitive form is *Sasasa*, and the Greek legends offer ΣΑΣΟΥ.²¹ Significantly, the last known Indo-Parthian ruler was Farn-Sāsān, son of Ādūr-Sāsān (see below).

We may draw some conclusions regarding the dynastic connections of the House of Gondophares on the grounds of the Gondophares-Sāses coins. The monarch's tiara depicted on them, which is decorated with stags and horns, copies the tiaras of Sinatruces and Phraates III (71/70–57 BC), the first kings of the Sinatruceid line.²² No tiaras of this kind had appeared on Parthian coinage for nearly a hundred years until Vologases I (51–79 AD). This fact suggests that Gondophares and his scions, by referring to Sinatruces and his son, were highlighting their origins and their royal claims.

A substantial role in the rise of Indo-Parthia must have been played by the Sūrēn clan, whose principal lands lay in Sakastan.²³ This clan, a staunch supporter of the Sinatruceids against Artabanus II in the west, came out in favour of Gondophares after Vonones I's disaster. Perhaps

this development neither happened overnight, nor was immediately flaunted. Nonetheless when Artabanus II crushed a rebellion of the Sūrēn leader Abdagases in 36 AD (see Tac. *Ann.* 6.31, 36–37, 42–44),²⁴ the clan's hitherto privileged position in western Parthia must have declined. The name Abdagases is not recorded anywhere else in the history of Iran except for two Indo-Parthian rulers (Abdagases I and II).²⁵ The fact that a nephew of Gondophares and one of his successors in Indo-Parthia bore the name Abdagases (II) implies that the Sūrēn were close kinsmen of Gondophares. Thus the close kinship between Abdagases II and Abdagases Sūrēn mentioned by Tacitus is very probable.

In view of the fact that dynasties representing different branches of the Arsacids ruled in Parthia and Indo-Parthia, we may speak of two Parthian states in the later Arsacid period. The Gondopharid state survived until the early third century AD. Its relations with the western Parthians under the Vologasids (51–226 AD) took varied courses. At certain times the Indo-Parthians appear to have acknowledged the hegemony of their western cousins.

The coins of the later Indo-Parthians²⁶ are of low weight and quality. Most of them are imitations of the issues of Pakores, a Gondopharid ruler of the beginning of the second century AD. Greek and Kharosthi legends became corrupted. Coins bear portraits of several rulers wearing diadems or different tiaras, some of which are adorned with the Gondopharid symbol. This symbol also appears elsewhere on the coins. Some of these issues have Parthian inscriptions in front of the face or around the head. Many coins are counterstruck imitations of Kushan issues of Vasudeva with OESHO (Shiva) written on both sides. This feature dates the coins to the second half of the second century AD. The quality of monetary output improved under the last known Indo-Parthian prince, Farn-Sāsān, whose name used to be misread as Ardāmītra until recently the name was correctly read by A.B. Nikitin.²⁷ Farn-Sāsān's coins show a ruler wearing a diadem on the obverse, while the reverse depicts a fire altar flanked by two incense burners. Identically shaped fire altars occur on coins of the Sasanian king Ardāshīr I. The inscription on the Indo-Parthian coins reads: "Farn-Sāsān, son (of) Ādūr-Sāsān, grandson of Tiridat, great-grandson of Sānabar, King of Kings" (*prnssn – BRY 'twrssn – BRY BRY tyrdy BRY – npy s'nbry MLKYN MLK*').

Nothing is known about Tiridat[es] and Ādūr-Sāsān, the ancestors of the Farn-Sāsān named on the coins. The main point of reference for Farn-Sāsān is Sānabar, an Indo-Parthian king ruling about 100 AD. The altar motif suggests a close connection between the coinages of Farn-Sāsān and Ardāshīr. But who was imitating whom? M. Alam believes that Farn-Sāsān was Ardāshīr's contemporary and copied the latter's coinage.²⁸ But the title King of Kings indicates that Farn-Sāsān had substantial political claims which would have conflicted with the even more ambitious

plans of Ardāshīr I. Sakastan was annexed by Ardāshīr around 224–225 AD, shortly after the death of Artabanus IV.²⁹ After 224/225 AD issues by Farn-Sāsān of coins with the King of Kings honorific would be unlikely, whereas Ardāshīr commenced issuing coins with the fire altar motif once he had declared himself King of Kings in 224 AD or even later in 226/227.³⁰ It is probable that Farn-Sāsān's reign in Sakastan ended in 224/225 AD, if not slightly earlier, and his chief successor there was a prince called Ardāshīr (see below). Taking into account historical circumstances and chronological limits, the conclusion to be drawn is that it was Ardāshīr I who borrowed the fire altar motif from Farn-Sāsān.

The Parthian name "Sāsān"

The main component of the name Farn-Sāsān is the word *ssn*/Sāsān, which was in widespread use in eastern Parthia, including the Nisa texts. The etymology of Sāsān is controversial. D.N. McKenzie and V.A. Livshits derive it from Old Iranian *Sāsāna, "Defeating enemy".³¹ Documents from Parthian Nisa, Merv (Marw) and Kosha-depe in Turkmenistan (Parthia proper and Margiana) contain many instances of the name Sāsān.³² It is extant in numerous composita like Sāsāndāt and Sāsānbuxt. These composite names show that Sāsān was in fact the name of a regional Zoroastrian deity worshipped in eastern Parthia and also in Khwarezm (Chorasnia).³³ The name Sāsān also occurs in Armenia and Sogdiana, evidently as a result of Parthian influence.³⁴ Bearing the distribution of its incidence in mind, we have to conclude that it was most prevalent in Parthia proper, and therefore it was a Parthian name.

Recently M. Schwartz has proposed another etymology of Sāsān.³⁵ He sees a continuum from the ancient Syrophoenician form *Sasm to the Late Antique Greek and Aramaic form *Sæsaen*/*Sesen*. But his alleged Parthian *Sesen* for *ssn* is not convincing, for linguistically no links are discernible between *Sasm or *Sæsaen*/*Sesen* and Parthian *ssn*. Moreover, the occurrence of the non-Persian name *ssn* spelled in Greek Σασαν or Σασάνης in the ŠKZ inscription clearly implies that this is actually the Parthian name Sāsān. This name was borne by several Parthian grandees, including members of the Sūrēn clan. Thus, Livshits's explanation remains valid.

The Genealogy of Sāsān

It is well known that a character named Sāsān occurs in Ardāshīr's genealogies as recorded in various major sources.³⁶ There is no evidence for the occurrence of the name Sāsān in Persis before the third century AD. The appearance in Persis of the Parthian name Sāsān, previously known only from its occurrence in the eastern regions of Parthia and Indo-Parthia, is by no means a random event. There must have

been a special political connection with the Indo-Parthians from Sakastan as well as Arachosia and Persis. Ardashir's controversial genealogy includes a character named Sāsān and another ancestor called Pābag. The evidence consists of several informative works, including the *Shahnameh*, the *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān*, Tabari's *History*, early Sasanian inscriptions and coins, western sources (Agathias, Synkellos) and Armenian evidence. There are substantial differences between some of them.

Sāsān in the Shahnameh and the Pahlavi sources

In the *Shahnameh* Sāsān³⁷ is a scion of the Kayanid kings Dārā (II), Dārā (I)/Dārāyan, Ardashir Bahman, Esfandiyar and Goshtasp. Dārā II, the last Kayanid king before Alexander, is a distant echo of the Achaemenid king Darius III (336–330 BC), who was vanquished by the Macedonian king.³⁸ In the story of Bahman and Homay, Sāsān (the Elder) is the son of Ardashir Bahman,³⁹ called Ardashīr ī Kay (the Kayanid), who also appears in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*.⁴⁰ Ardashir Bahman has been identified with various Achaemenid kings.⁴¹ It seems that an identification with Artaxerxes II Mnemon (404–359 BC) is the most convincing.⁴² This prince also appears in Parthian genealogies as the ancestor of the Arsacids.⁴³ The inclusion of the Kayanids in Sāsān's genealogy was intended to prove Ardashir I's descent from the Kayanids (as a kind of reminiscence of the Achaemenids) and thus to create a connection between the Sasanians and the mythical kings of the past. *Shahnameh* represents "genuine Persian tradition", based on the Sasanian chronicle *Xwadāy-nāmag*.⁴⁴

Ferdowsī maintains that Sāsān (the Elder), son of Dārā, was a Persian prince who fled to India and lived there as a shepherd.⁴⁵ He died in obscurity in India, but left behind a son who bore his name, "which continued in the family for four generations".⁴⁶ His descendant, also called Sāsān, worked for Babak (Pābag), the ruler of Estakhr in Persis (Fars). Pābag gave him his daughter in marriage. The princess gave birth to Ardashir Babakan (Pābagān). Afterwards Sāsān (the Younger) disappears from the story.

The *Shahnameh* tradition suggests that the ancestral seat of Sāsān's forebears was in India, where they had fled in apprehension of the arrival of Alexander. This item of data calls for special attention, as it seems to have been intended as the approved explanation of Sāsān's Indo-Parthian origins.

A genealogy of Ardashir is preserved in the *Kārnāmag* in the formula: *ardaxšīr ī kay ī pābāgān ī az tohmag ī sāsān ud nāf ī dārāy šāh*⁴⁷ – "Ardaxšīr, the Kayanid, son of Pābag from the parentage of Sāsān and from the lineage of King Dārā". In the *Bundahishn* (35.36, A232) the genealogy of Ardashir is given as *Artaxšahr ī Pābagān kē-š mād duxt ī Sāsān ī Weh-āfrīd*⁴⁸ – "Ardashir son of Bābak whose mother (was) the daughter of Sāsān son of Weh-āfrīd". Thus the Pahlavi evidence shows differences in detail concerning the position of Sāsān. Pābag is deemed to be

Ardashir's father, while Sāsān appears as the grandfather or unspecified forebear of Ardashir I. But the common point is that this tradition names both Pābag and Sāsān in Ardashir's genealogy.

Sāsān in Roman and Armenian sources

The third-century Roman records call Ardashir a Persian and use the name *Artaxerxes*, copying the variant of a well-known Achaemenid name. They note that Ardashir recovered the kingdom of the Persians (Herodian 6.2.6–7; Dio 80.3.1–2). These records bear tell-tale signs of the propaganda the first Sasanians addressed to the Romans: both Ardashir I and Shapur I endeavoured to portray themselves as successors to the ancient Persians, not as an offshoot of the Arsacids. This was the message they disseminated among the Persians too.

Paradoxically, later Roman records turned out to be better informed on Ardashir's real family connections than the third-century authors. A very interesting tradition is preserved in the chronicle of Agathias II, 27, 1–5: 1.

*It is said that Artaxares' [i.e. Ardashir's] mother was married to a certain Pabak, who was quite obscure, a leather worker by trade, but very learned in astrology and easily able to discern the future. 2. It so happened that a soldier called Sasanus, who was travelling through the land of the Cadusaei, was given hospitality by Pabak and lodged in his house. 3. The latter recognized somehow, in his capacity as a seer, I presume, that the offspring of his guest would be splendid and famous and would reach great good fortune. He was disappointed and upset that he had no daughter or sister or any other close relative. But finally he yielded his own wife to him and gave up his marriage bed, nobly enduring the shame and preferring the future good fortune to the present disgrace and dishonour. 4. And so Artaxares was born, and was reared by Pabak. But when he grew up and boldly seized the throne, a bitter quarrel and dispute immediately broke out between Sasanus and Pabak. Each of them wanted him to be called his son. 5. Finally, and with difficulty, they agreed that he should be called the son of Pabak, though born from the seed of Sasanus. This is the genealogy of Artaxares given by the Persians, and they say it is true since it is actually recorded in the Royal Archives.*⁴⁹

A similar story is preserved in Synkellos [p. 440.11–441.2 (p. 677.11–678.7 CSHB)]:

After Artabanus, the family of Chosroes [i.e. the Sasanians] began to rule. It began as follows: Artaxerxes [i.e. Ardashir], an unknown and undistinguished Persian, gathered a body of irregular troops, destroyed Artabanus and assumed the crown. And he once more restored the Kingship to the Persians. He was a Magian and through him the Magians have become prestigious in Persia. They say that the mother of Artaxerxes lived with a man called Pambecus, who was a shoe-maker by profession, but an astrologer and in this respect versed in the dark arts or stuff and nonsense. And a soldier by the name of Sananus [sic] was marching through the land of the Cadusaei

and was entertained in the house of Pambecus, and Pambecus had “foreknowledge”, we suppose, through his astrology, that the offspring of Sananus would be raised to a high level of good fortune. But not having a daughter or a sister or any female relative, he shut in his own wife with Sananus, and she conceived and brought forth Artaxerxes. Chosroes’ family, therefore, was descended from this Artaxerxes, also called Artaxares.⁵⁰

Agathias claims that Ardashir’s biological father was Sāsān, whereas Pābag was his adoptive father. This tradition reflects the attempts the first Sasanians made to present their ancestry in compliance with their legitimising dynastic policy, in which the role of Sāsān was deliberately relegated to a backstage position. Agathias’s harangue is prejudiced against the Sasanians but as far as Ardashir’s genealogy is concerned, his data partly coincide with the image propagated by Ardashir I and Shapur I. This comes as no surprise, since Agathias or his informant Sergius had access to the Sasanian archives.⁵¹

Contrary to Agathias and Synkellos, the Armenian authors Moses Khorenatsi (2.67) and Agathangelos (Armenian version, 18–20) call Ardashir the son of Sāsān without hesitation. They do not name Pābag. Furthermore the Greek version of Agathangelos calls Ardashir “son of Sananus, which is the origin of the Sasanian name of the Persian kings descended from him”.⁵²

Sāsān in the *History of Tabari*

Tabari gives Ardashir three genealogies which differ on details but all say that Sāsān married a princess Rāmbihisht of the Persian Bāzrangid/Bāzranjīn family, the minor vassal dynasty of Persis/Fars (Tabari 813–814), and was the father of Pābag (Babak) and the grandfather of Ardashir (cf. the table below). Tabari emphasises Sāsān’s links with Estakhr and the temple of Anahid. Tabari 813–814 says that Sāsān was the custodian of the temple of Anahid at Estakhr. He was also a devotee of the chase and equestrian pursuits, customs typical of Iranian aristocracy. Perhaps Sāsān was both priest and prince, like Tiridates, the Arsacid king of Armenia crowned by his brother Vologases I in 53 AD and then by Nero in Rome in 66 AD.⁵³ Assuming that Sāsān came from Sakastan, a country exceptionally important for the preservation and development of Zoroastrianism,⁵⁴ one may easily understand that he was deemed also as a person capable of taking on a cultic function. This may suggest that Sāsān’s position as temple custodian in Fars was a result of his priesthood competences.

After the accession of Ardashir, the Bāzrangids disappear from historical testimonies.⁵⁵ Sāsān and Rāmbihisht’s son Pābag (Babak) consolidated his power with the help of his own sons, Shapur and Ardashir. Ardashir made himself the castellan (*argbed*) of Dārābgerd. He induced his father to join a plot to kill the Bāzrangid king of Estakhr and rose in open rebellion against the Parthians (Tabari 813, 815–16).

Table 3.1: Genealogies of Sāsān in the *History of Tabari*

Version I, Tabari 813	Version II, Tabari 813	Version III, Tabari 823
Ardashir	Ardashir	Ardashir
Babak Shah, King of Khīr	Babak	Babak
Sāsān	Sāsān	Sāsān the Elder
Babak	Babak	Ardashir
Sāsān	Zarar	Bahman
Babak	Bihafridh	Isfandiyar
M.h.r.m.s	Sāsān	
Sāsān	Bahman	
King Bahman	Isfandiyar	
Isfandiyar	Bishtasb	
Bishtasb	Luhrasb	
Luhrasb		
Kaywaji		
Kaymanush		

Tabari’s genealogy for Sāsān is patently defective, for it gives no historical characters bridging the gap between Sāsān and the Kayanids; it does not even cite Dārā, who is enumerated in the *Shahnameh*. A common point of Sāsān’s genealogies in the *Shahnameh* and Tabari is the fact that Sāsān was a newcomer in Persis/Fars; he had no ancestors there. Tabari’s Sāsān may be defined as an impoverished prince of foreign origin (a fact passed over in silence by Tabari) who established himself in Persis. The first recognisable character in Tabari’s genealogies of Sāsān is Bahman. Tabari says nothing about Sāsān’s forebears living in India as related in the *Shahnameh* tradition.

Sāsān versus Pābag in early Sasanian inscriptions and coinage

Ardashir I calls himself son of the “divine Pābag, the king”, on his Naqsh-e Rostam inscription⁵⁶ and on his coins.⁵⁷ In his inscriptions at Naqsh-e Rostam, Shapur I is designated as son of Ardashir I and grandson of Pābag.⁵⁸ In his genealogy recorded in the Ka’ba-ye Zardosht (ŠKZ) inscription, Shapur I goes only as far as “divine king Pābag” (*bay Pābag šāh*) and no Sāsān is mentioned at all (ŠKZ § 1.10).⁵⁹ The ŠKZ inscription names as the first prince a Lord (*xwadāy*) Sāsān among the rulers who lived in the reign of Pābag (ŠKZ § 40).⁶⁰ The list of Shapur’s ancestors in ŠKZ § 36, which enumerates offerings for members of the royal family, is significant. In this section, Sāsān the Lord (*xwadāy*) comes first in the list, while Pābag is called king (*šāh*). “King” Shapur (Ardashir’s brother) is called the son of Pābag.

Generally, Shapur I is called in the ŠKZ the grandson of Pābag and son of Ardashir I.

Characters named Sāsān occur several times in the ŠKZ inscription, but none of them is referred to as related to the house of Ardashir. We know of two Sāsāns at the court of Ardashir I, Sūrēn Sāsān and Sāsān Andēgān, among the few named potentates. Both are representatives of great Parthian clans. The dominions of Andēgān are difficult to locate but it seems that their core lay in eastern Iran. Samʿani in *Kitab al-Ansab* knows a village called Andukan near the city of Sarakhs.⁶¹ The name implies that the location was the stronghold of the Andēgān, maybe even their heartland. The presence of Sūrēn Sāsān at the court of Ardashir is perfectly understandable, as the Sūrēn clan was one of the mainstays of Ardashir's rebellion against Artabanus IV.

At Shapur I's court we discern a eunuch Sāsān, son of Sāsān, and a judge named Sāsān. There is also one Winnār, son of Sāsān (Winnār ī Sāsānīgān). These individuals hold fairly minor offices. In later centuries the name Sāsān is rare in Persia.⁶²

In face of the fact that in a number of ancient testimonies Sāsān is closely linked to Ardashir, his omission from Shapur's official genealogy tells its own story. There was apparently something that Shapur I intended to pass over in silence. As a matter of fact, the dynasty was called Sāsānian, not Pābagian/Bābakian. Significantly, Narseh's inscription from Paikuli (NPi) speaks directly of the glory and rulership of the clan of Sāsān. The phrase "since the gods gave glory and rulership to the family of Sāsān" (*yazdān farrah šahr-xwadāyīf ō tōhm čē Sāsānagān dād*)⁶³ demonstrates that for Narseh I, Sāsān is the main point of reference as an ancestor.

The "Heir Apparent" coins

Ardashir's coinage provides a salient source for his reign.⁶⁴ One of his last issues is the so-called "Heir Apparent" coins, showing the king and the head of a young man wearing a tiara. They were minted in the last decade of the reign, i.e. between 229/230 and 239/240 AD.⁶⁵ Ever since the time of F.D.J. Paruck, these coins have been regarded as presenting an image of Ardashir with his son and heir, Shapur. Apart from the name Ardashir the rest of the legend is indecipherable. Michael Alram analysed the coins recently and stated that chemical analysis of Farn-Sāsān's coinage has given results which are in accord with those for the Heir Apparent coins;⁶⁶ in other words, the Heir Apparent coins were minted in Sakastan. Perhaps, as suggested by Alram, the young prince on them is the king of Sakastan, Ardashir, mentioned in the Shapur I's inscription.

The coins showing Ardashir I with his heir provide evidence that most probably his son (?), the ruler of Sakastan, was intended to be his successor. But as we know, it was Shapur I who succeeded to the throne. If Shapur's accession meant the failure of another candidate's bid for

the throne, he would have been interested in concealing the facts regarding Ardashir's connection with Sakastan and the succession plans he had made. Hence the machinations in the ŠKZ inscription and the cover-up of the fact that Ardashir's real father was Sāsān, who had come from Sakastan.

Ardashir versus the Younger Arsacids

Ardashir's conquests have been analysed frequently.⁶⁷ Here I am interested in the strategic situation in Iran when Ardashir started to transcend the borders of Persis/Fars, that is around 220 AD. At that time the Parthian empire was divided into two parts ruled by Walagaš/Vologases V and Ardavan/Artabanus IV. Vologases ruled in Babylonia and Maishan, while his brother Artabanus IV controlled western Iran, Kirman, Parthia proper, Media, Susiana/Khuzestan, Mesopotamia (Asuristan) and Atropatene/Adhurbaigan. Khosrov, ruler of Armenia, was a member of a collateral line of the same House of the Younger Arsacids. The House of the Gondopharids or Indo-Parthians, represented by Farn-Sāsān, as it seems, had an alliance with Ardashir I, resulting from blood ties and, more importantly, a common political interest based on the intention of defeating or even destroying the western Arsacids.

At first, Ardashir made consistent efforts to conquer Persis/Fars. He subdued Estakhr and Darabgird, two of the five regions of Persis/Fars. Only then did he attack Kirman.⁶⁸ He vanquished king Balash (Vologases) and made one of his own sons, Ardashir, governor there (Tabari 817). Ardashir, son of Ardashir I, is listed in the ŠKZ as the king of Kirman. Only later did Ardashir conquer the coastland of Fars.⁶⁹ In 224 AD Ardashir overcame Artabanus IV at the battle of Hormuzgan. Two years later he captured Ctesiphon, thus eliminating Vologases V. By and large Ardashir managed to defeat the western Arsacids and to kill the legitimate male heirs in Parthia. But even after 226 AD there were still some residual foci of opposition left in Armenia and Atropatene, the bastions of the western Arsacids. Another unsubdued hotbed was Hatra, a powerful city with a dynasty whose members were kinsmen of the Arsacids.

In Tabari's life of Shapur I, Ardashir I is presented as an intransigent enemy of the Parthians. Remarkably the motif of a strong antipathy to the Arsacids comes in Tabari in the biography of Shapur I, who must have been interested in disseminating the story of vengeance on the Arsacids. Of course, this would mean the western Arsacids, not the Sakastan line, from which Shapur himself probably derived. Tabari (823) gives a reason why Ardashir I could have adopted such an attitude. In his chapter on Shapur I (Sābūr al-Junūd) he refers to the vow of Sāsān the Elder: "When Ardashīr b. Bābak had attained the royal power, he wrought great slaughter among the Arsacids (*al-Ashakāniyyah*), to whom belonged the "Party Kings",

until he had exterminated them, in accordance with an oath which Sāsān the Elder (...) had sworn: that, if at some point, he should attain the royal power, he would not spare a single one of the progeny of Ashak, son of Khurrah.”⁷⁰

Ardashir’s eastern campaigns and the role of Armenia

An examination of Ardashir’s military campaigns in eastern Iran will help to obtain a clearer picture of his political strategy. There is an ongoing debate as to when Ardashir conducted what is known as his eastern campaign. The data in the records seem to be at odds with each other. According to Tabari, after the battle of Hormuzgan Ardashir invaded Atropatene, Adiabene and Asuristan. Then, after taking Ctesiphon in 226/227 AD, he prepared his eastern campaign. But according to the *Nihayat*, the eastern campaign was fought *before* the capture of Ctesiphon. Some scholars date the eastern campaign even after 233.⁷¹

In my opinion Ardashir conducted two eastern campaigns – one in 224/5 AD, and another in c. 233 AD. They had completely different strategic aims. The first campaign reached Marw and Sakastan and could indeed be described as “collecting up” the lands of the Parthians. The second campaign went further, perhaps up to Bactria and Chorasmia, beyond the borders of the former Parthian state. After the victory at Hormuzgan, Ardashir wanted to settle matters in the east in order to rally reinforcements for an attack on Hatra and Armenia, the powerful bastions of the western Arsacids. He must have realised that large-scale operations in the vicinity of the border with Rome would provoke a conflict with the western power. As a consequence of the changes which had ensued in the balance of power in Iran, Rome was now an ally of the Arsacids in Armenia and Hatra. Therefore, what Ardashir needed was to secure his rear, that is eastern Iran, and to assemble his armed contingents. In view of Ardashir’s strategic goals, the version which sounds the most consistent and reliable is presented in the *Nihayat*’s account.

According to the *Nihayat*, after Hormuzgan Ardashir marched into Khorasan and spent a year in Marw until all the kings of Khorasan offered their submission. In all likelihood, the years 224–225 AD are precisely when Sakastan acknowledged the authority of Ardashir I and was incorporated into the empire. The King of Kings is credited with founding the city of Zarang in Sakastan.⁷² The next stage was the conquest of Atropatene/Adhurbaigan and the fighting against Armenia. Ardashir failed in his war with Armenia, just as his assaults on Parthian Hatra came to nothing.

While some of the western provinces of the Parthian empire put up fierce resistance against Ardashir, the eastern regions of Iran acquiesced without much ado. Except for Kirman, where Ardashir’s son was installed, the princes of

this region acknowledged Ardashir’s hegemony without putting up any opposition. Kirman fought against Ardashir I because it was one of the mainstays of the Younger Arsacids. It is to be noted that the founder of the Younger Arsacids, Artabanus II, was closely linked to Kirman.⁷³

Significantly the rulers of eastern Iran held the chief offices in the imperial hierarchy under Ardashir I. These princes were, apart from Ardashir, king of Kirman, Sadaluf, king of Abrenag (in Khorasan), Ardashir, king of Marw, and Ardashir, king of Sakastan. We do not know the exact identity of Ardashir, king of Sakastan/Sagestan under the King of Kings Ardashir I.⁷⁴ He may have been Ardashir I’s son, known from the “Heir Apparent” coins.

In the third century AD Sakastan was one of the chief provinces of Iran, and it was commonly governed by an heir to the throne, including a son of Ardashir, who was removed from the political stage by Shapur I, and then Narseh I, son of Shapur I, who later became King of Kings (293–302 AD). In Sakastan Narseh was followed by Wahram III.⁷⁵

Sakastan (Sagestan) occurs in Shapur I’s inscription as a land connected with Turan and Hindustan/Hindestan, in other words Sind.⁷⁶ The title King of Hindestan, Sagestan and Turan occurs in an inscription from Persepolis dated to 310/311 AD in relation to a ruler called Shapur.⁷⁷ Sakastan, earlier known as Drangiana/Zarangiana or the land of the Ariaspi, had been an important centre for Zoroastrianism already in Achaemenid times. In the third century AD religious and cultural matters acted as a firm bond linking Persis and Sakastan.⁷⁸ Sakastan’s religious connections with Persis were by no means coincidental and ran parallel to political affiliation.

The Armenian sources provide invaluable and unique information on the fall of the Younger Arsacids in Iran and the attitudes of the Parthian clans. Armenia was governed by a branch of the Younger Arsacids, the scions of Tiridates I (c. 52–80 AD), the brother of Vologases I. This put the Armenian Arsacids in the position of adversaries of Ardashir and Shapur I. The first Sasanians appreciated Armenia’s signal importance, but were not able to subdue it permanently. Shapur I temporarily conquered Armenia, where, as in Sakastan, a dominion was set aside for Sasanian heirs apparent.

In compliance with the facts, the Armenian author Moses Khorenatsi writes that Ardashir I was defeated by the Armenian King Khosrov (Chosroes) and was ready to make substantial concessions (271–73).⁷⁹ According to another historian Agathangelos, Khosrov anxiously tracked the rise of Ardashir (Artasiras) in Iran:⁸⁰ “*These events were reported to Chosroes the Arsacid ruler of Great Armenia, that Artasiras the son of Sasanus had gained the throne of Persia and had destroyed Artabanus his brother. There was an additional report that the Parthians preferred the kingship of Artasiras to that of their own countryman.*”

Parthian clans against Artabanus IV

One of the most astonishing phenomena in the career of Artashir I is the fact that he enjoyed the support of the chief Parthian clans Sūrēn, Kārin and Andēgān. The origin of another family, the Wārāz – mentioned in early Sasanian inscriptions – is not clear. The Armenian author, Moses Khorenatsi (2.71), claims that the great Parthian clans supported the rebellion of Artashir: “*After Artashir, son of Sāsān, had killed Artavan and gained the throne, two branches of the Pahlav family called Aspahapet and Surēn Pahlav were jealous that their own kinsman Artashes should rule, and willingly accepted the rule of Artashir, son of Sāsān.*”⁸¹ Moses also writes that the House of Kārin Pahlav stood in opposition to “Artashir” (Artashir), but this claim must have referred to one of the subsidiary branches of the clan, since we know that members of the clan called Peroz Kārin and Gog Kārin held prominent offices at Artashir’s court (ŠKZ § 42). Agathangelos (Greek version) knows of a certain Karinas, sent along with Zekas as Artashir’s envoys to Artabanus IV: they are called “the most important clan leaders and generals”.⁸² Karinas was clearly a member of the Parthian Kārin clan. Zekas (Ζηκάς) is mentioned in ŠKZ § 40.7 as Zīk – he probably represented a Persian family.⁸³

The ancient sources speak of the law generally recognised throughout Iran that only Arsacid blood was eligible for the throne. Adherence to and respect for the Arsacid dynasty was an extremely strong and enduring factor in Parthian Iran. Only an Arsacid could be invested with *khvarenah/farr*, the royal glory which qualified him to exercise power (Strab. 16.1.28; Amm. 23.6.6). The Parthians in opposition to Artabanus IV regarded him as a king whose rule was “unlawful”. Artashir and the rebels were said not to tolerate “a despotic attitude”.⁸⁴ The arguments Agathangelos uses here are not directed against the Arsacids as a whole, but specifically against Artabanus IV. The allegations of his despotism are reminiscent of similar charges laid in the first century AD, when the Sūrēn and Kārin clans attempted to overthrow Artabanus II and Gotarzes II. The Parthian conspirators against Gotarzes acted in Rome and went to great lengths to make it clear that they did not intend to abjure the House of Arsaces, but only wanted to put the son of Vonones and grandson of Phraates IV on the throne, spurning the rule of Gotarzes. We are left with the impression that Gotarzes belonged to the *familia Arsacidarum* (Tac. Ann. 12.10.1–2). In the *Annales* 12.14.3 Tacitus appears to suggest that Meherdates, the grandson of Phraates IV, was a relative of Gotarzes from the same Arsacid stock, but Gotarzes looked down on him, regarding him as a foreigner and a Roman (*atque ille non propinquum neque Arsacis de gente, sed alienigenam et Romanum abcrepans*).

According to Moses Khorenatsi the Armenian king Khosrov was saddened because his relatives had submitted

to Artashir. Khosrov sent messengers asking his Parthian relatives “in the lands of the Kushans”, i.e. in eastern Iran, to come to his aid against the Persians. But the Sūrēn and Aspahapet clans did not agree (2.71–72). Khosrov was informed that his “kinsman Vehsachan with his branch of the Karēn (Kārin) Pahlav had not given obeisance to Artashir” (2.72).⁸⁵ Artashir is said to have slaughtered all the branch of the Karēn Pahlav. One child was rescued – the ancestor of the Armenian family Kamsarakan (2.73). The Parthian clans, especially the Sūrēn, had lent their support to Artashir in return for far-reaching concessions. Moses Khorenatsi maintains that Artashir promised to return to the Pahlavs [Parthians] “*their original homeland called Pahlav, the royal city Bahl, and all the country of the Kushans. Similarly he promised the form and splendour of royalty, half of [the empire of] the Aryans, and second place under his own authority. Attracted by this, Anak, who was from the Surēn Pahlav line, undertook to kill Khosrov.*” (2.74)⁸⁶

The accounts of Moses and Agathangelos show that Artashir I won over the great clans of Parthia to his side. In the struggles against the Younger Arsacids the Sūrēn represented to some extent the Indo-Parthian realm. On the whole we may speak of a coalition comprising Artashir, the Sūrēn and part of the Kārin, along with the later Gondopharids, against the western Arsacids, who after the capture of Ctesiphon in 226 AD were still defending their positions in Armenia and Hatra. The final outcome of the war was in 226 not yet apparent. Khosrov’s assassination by Anak, a Sūrēn clansman, shows how committed the clan’s support was (see the Armenian version of Agathangelos 24–32).

It is to be supposed that Artashir’s claims to the Arsacid throne were treated by the most powerful Parthian clans of the East as legitimate demands, for the prince was actually an Arsacid through his father’s line. The rebellion led by Artashir was just another phase of a long-lived conflict between the Younger Arsacids and the Indo-Parthian rulers, who stemmed from the Sinatruclid line. Artashir’s rebellion against Artabanus IV would have had no chance of success without Artashir’s claim to Arsacid descent. My hypothesis attempts to explain the reasons for the Parthian clans taking this view.

Sāsān, Pābag and Artashir I – facts and manipulations

The key figure in the history of the downfall of the Arsacids was Sāsān, an Indo-Parthian prince who married a Persian princess, who then gave birth to Artashir I. For reasons of propaganda Artashir I, and later Shapur I, endeavoured to downplay Sāsān’s role, so as not to be perceived in Persis as a foreign dynasty. We do not know whether it was Pābag who hid Sāsān away from the full glare of public view. After his takeover, Artashir himself, fearing that the

local aristocracy in Persis might perceive him as a foreign prince, might have been interested in such a move. While in Persis, Ardashir preferred to stress his Persian roots, rather than present himself as originating from Sakastan. This is why Ardashir's coins call Pābag his father. The first Sasanians manipulated the official accounts about their origin and connection to Sāsān. Later Shapur I had additional reasons to deny his connection with Sakastan. For him it was a case of obliterating the memory of his rival who ruled in Sakastan and had been designated by Ardashir I to succeed to the Iranian throne. This is why Ardashir and Shapur highlight on their coins their origin from Pābag and omit Sāsān. In the preamble of the ŠKZ the original point of reference in Shapur's genealogy is Pābag. Narseh, on the contrary, had Sāsān mentioned as his eponym; he became King of Kings in 293 AD after dynastic quarrels⁸⁷ and spent many years in Sakastan. This difference in genealogical records implies that some kings deliberately forged the facts and both the first Sasanians arouse the greatest suspicion in this respect.

By and large, the exact relationship between Sāsān and Pābag is obscure.⁸⁸ In the ŠKZ the mother of Pābag is given as Dēnag, but it is not stated whether she was married to Sāsān. It seems that Pābag was Ardashir's father-in-law, and maybe his adoptive father. If Pābag had been Ardashir's biological father and the son of the Persian Sāsān, the first Sasanians would have had no reason to be reticent about fundamental facts concerning their lineage. However, in the official propaganda Sāsān was pushed from view and mentioned only cursorily, without a clear indication of his ancestral relation to later generations, as may be seen in the ŠKZ inscription. That is why the data from the Armenian sources and the *Shahnameh* may be treated as trustworthy. The Armenian Arsacids were well informed on Ardashir's family relationships and kinship. Starting with Narseh's account, which names Sāsān as the dynasty's founding ancestor and passes over Pābag in silence, the Sasanians did not promote the figure of Pābag, instead acknowledging Sāsān. By this time their power was consolidated enough for them not to have worried about such measures to bolster their genealogy with bogus data. More reliable information on Ardashir's ancestry is not to be had until the late Sasanians, and that is why the tradition of Sāsān as the progenitor of Ardashir survived in the *Shahnameh* as well as in the account of Agathias.

It is to be noted that the Gondopharid symbol appears on the coat of arms used by a companion of Ardashir I, as depicted on the Firuzabad relief. This may be explained by the assumption that Ardashir's family had close ties to the Gondopharid branch of the Arsacids.

It is not a coincidence that one of the best ancient experts on early Sasanian Iran, Ammianus Marcellinus, does not see any break in Partho-Sasanian history and that he speaks of the rule of the house of Arsaces as lasting until his days

in the fourth century AD. In his *Res gestae* (23.6.5–6) Ammianus claims:

(5) Hence to this very day the over-boastful kings of that race suffer themselves to be called brothers of the Sun and Moon, and just as for our emperors the title of Augustus is beloved and coveted, so to the Parthian kings, who were formerly low and obscure, there fell the very greatest increase in distinction, won by the happy auspices of Arsaces. (6) Hence they venerate and worship Arsaces as a god, and their regard for him has been carried so far, that even down to the memory of our time only a man who is of the stock of Arsaces (if there is one anywhere) is preferred to all in mounting the throne. Even in any civil strife, which constantly arises among them, everyone avoids as sacrilege the lifting of his hand against an Arsacid, whether he is bearing arms or is a private citizen.⁸⁹

Hence Ammianus implies that Arsaces was an ancestor of Shapur II (309–379 AD). In the extant fragments of his *Res gestae* there are no references to Sāsān and the early Sasanians.⁹⁰ Ammianus was well informed and must have heard of Ardashir's rebellion, but evidently he considered him an Arsacid *de facto*. The reigns of the descendants of Sāsān could be seen as comparable to the rule of the junior lines of the Arsacids, in bitter conflict with each other in the first and second centuries AD. For example, the Phraatids were at enmity with the Artabanids, and later the Hyrcanian-Dahian faction feuded with the Atropatenian branch.

Some Persians sided with Artabanus IV against Ardashir: "He had a large number of Persians who were not confederates of the council of their own countrymen."⁹¹ However, it was the victors, not the vanquished, who wrote the history, readily manipulating the facts.

Conclusions

The old rivalry between branches of the Parthian royal house and clans, including the Younger (western) Arsacids, the Gondopharids in Indo-Parthia, the Sūrēn and Kārin, revived when a rebellion broke out in Persis under the leadership of Ardashir I, son of the Gondopharid prince Sāsān. The connections between the Gondopharids of Sakastan and the Sūrēn with Persis under Ardashir eventually led to the overthrow of the Younger Arsacids.

A comparison of the diverse traditions about Sāsān shows that the Persian writings and Sasanian inscriptions were manipulated for specific political reasons. The *Shahnameh* tradition traces Sāsān's ancestry to the late Kayanids, harking back to the historical Achaemenids. The same tradition suggests that the ancestral seat of Sāsān's forebears was in India, where they had fled in fear of Alexander. Sāsān was in fact a member of the Arsacid Gondopharid line, the ruling dynasty of Indo-Parthia, who reigned in Afghanistan and the north-western regions of India. Even under Farn-Sāsān they held Sakastan, Arachosia and probably part of Sind.

Most probably Sāsān was the father of Ardashir, as indicated by the *Shahnameh*, Agathias and the Armenian authors, and as implied by Narseh's inscription at Paikuli. The coins and inscriptions of Ardashir I and Shapur I say Ardashir I was the son of Pābag. Tabari, *Kārnāmāg* and *Bundahishn* give a version that Ardashir's father was Pābag, but include Sāsān in the genealogy.

How can these traditions be reconciled? In the history of Iran there were instances of monarchs adopting dignitaries who later acceded to the throne. This happened with Gotarzes II, the adopted son of Artabanus II. For Ardashir I we may assume that the *Shahnameh* and *Kārnāmāg* tradition is closer to the truth, and that Ardashir's genuine father was Sāsān. The assumption that Sāsān was the biological father of Ardashir I leads to the conclusion that Ardashir was in fact an Arsacid on the male line.

In the case of Sāsān or his sons, adoption may have been involved; the law and customary practices offered a range of possibilities. The ŠKZ 45 inscription mentions two princes named Sāsān under Shapur I. One prince Sāsān was adopted by the Farragan family, the other by the Kidugan family.⁹² Here adoption presumably means the admission of Parthians into the noble families of Persis. Adoption was regulated in Sasanian legislation, as evidenced by the *Mādayān ī hazār dādestān* (32, 11–33, 17, par. 28). That is how Pābag became the “adoptive” father of Ardashir.

For reasons of propaganda Ardashir I, and later Shapur I, endeavoured to downplay Sāsān's role, so as not to be perceived in Persis/Fars as a foreign dynasty. The paradox is that, assuming Sāsān was Ardashir's father, the Sasanian dynasty in fact had a Parthian, and perhaps even an Arsacid ancestry. Moreover, the early Sasanians built up their empire thanks to the support of the chief clans of Parthia including the Sūrēn and Kārin. That is why the Sasanian *Ērānšahr* has been referred to as “the empire of the Persians and Parthians”.⁹³ And that is why Ammianus perceived the royal house of Persia as the Arsacids.

Notes

- On Parthian clans, see Wolski 1989; Olbrycht 2003. On internal struggles in Parthia, see Olbrycht 2013 and 2013a.
- On Mithradates II, see Olbrycht 2010b.
- Lucian, *Makrob.* 15. On Sinatruces, see Debevoise 1938, p. 52–53; Karras-Klapproth 1988, p. 161–163; Olbrycht 1998, p. 110–112.
- Olbrycht 2010a.
- On Phraates IV and his rivals, see Karras-Klapproth, p. 137–145.
- On Phraataces, see Debevoise 1938, p. 143–151; Ziegler 1964, p. 51–57.
- For details, see Debevoise 1938, p. 70–149.
- Olbrycht 1997; 2013.
- More on this in Olbrycht 2013.
- Olbrycht 1998a.
- Vonones I's death: Debevoise 1938, p. 155.
- Indo-Parthians: Fröhlich 2006; 2008. Gondophares: Bivar 1981; 2002; 2007.
- Coins of Gondophares: Mitchiner 1975–6, types 1067–1071; NPIIN 1158–1175.
- On the epithet “Autokrator”, see Callataÿ and Lorber 2011, p. 450.
- Mitchiner 1975/1976, type 1071; Cribb 1985, p. 295.
- Sellwood 1980, 91.7–11.
- von Gall 1990, Abb. 3; Daryaee 2010, p. 242; Frye 1984, p. 200.
- Senior 2001, II, type 240.2D.
- Fröhlich 2008, p. 56 maintains that coins in the name of Gondophares were issued by two rulers.
- NPIIN 1203–1211; Senior 2001, type 244; coins b, e.
- NPIIN 264–266.
- Sellwood 1980, types 33, 37 and 39. On the attribution of Sellwood's type 33 to Sinatruces, see Olbrycht 1997a, p. 52; Loginov and Nikitin 1996. Coins of the Sinatruces circulated in Bactria in the nomadic principalities and were imitated there very often.
- See al-Tabari 1.683; Nöldeke 1879, p. 437.
- Olbrycht 2013b.
- Brunner 2011.
- Senior 2001, p. 271–279.
- Nikitin 1994.
- Afram 2007, p. 234.
- Afram 2007, p. 235 assumes that Ardashir I conquered Sakastan in about 233 AD, but the political circumstances point to an earlier dating around 224/5 AD, see the discussion below.
- See Afram in Afram and Gyselen 2003, p. 24–25. On the title King of Kings as Ardashir's honorific, see Afram in Afram and Gyselen 2003, p. 22–23. Cf. Wiesehöfer 1987.
- MacKenzie 1986, p. 114; Livshits 2010, p. 254.
- The most detailed study is Livshits 2010, p. 251–254, first published in 1977. Cf. Gignoux 2003, p. 64; Nikitin 1994, p. 170, n. 15.
- Livshits 2010, p. 253–254.
- Huyse 1999, II, p. 115.
- Schwartz 1996; 1998. Likewise Huyse 1999, II, p. 115.
- On Sāsān and his genealogy, see Frye 1989; Shaki 1990; Gignoux 1998; Daryaee 2007, p. 5–6; 2010; Huyse 1999, II, p. 115.
- Ferdowsi 1984, lines 4011ff. For the English translation, see Davis 2006, p. 530–531.
- See Tafazzoli 1994; Olbrycht 2004; Olbrycht 2010; Daryaee 2006, p. 48. Dārā II was the son of Dārā I and the last king of the Kayanid dynasty. His name is recorded as Dārā in the Pahlavi literature. In some Islamic sources (*Dārāb-nāma*) it is given as Dārāb.
- Davis 2006, p. 440.
- Cereti 1995, p. 152.
- On the identifications of Bahman with Artaxerxes I or even with Cyrus the Great and on the intermixture of various traditions concerning Bahman, see Yarshater 1971, p. 521f.; Khalegi-Motlagh 1988, p. 489–490.
- Boyce 1991, p. 385; Daryaee 2006, p. 495; Arjomand 1998, p. 245–248.
- See, e.g. Gutschmid 1888, p. 30; Wolski 1993, p. 56.

- 44 Daryaee 2006, p. 496.
- 45 “When Dara was killed in battle and his family fell upon dark times, a wise, brave son, who was called Sasan, survived him.” Davis 2006, p. 530.
- 46 Davis 2006, p. 530.
- 47 KNP in Nyberg 1964, 6.18–19; Grenet 2003, III.19, p. 68–69.
- 48 Frye 1989; Daryaee 2010, p. 243.
- 49 Translation after Cameron 1969/70, p. 87–88.
- 50 Translation after M.H. Dodgeon in: Dodgeon, Lieu 2002, p. 9–10.
- 51 Cameron 1969/1970; Gariboldi 2005.
- 52 *History of the Armenians*, Greek version, 3. Translation after Dodgeon, Lieu 2002, p. 14.
- 53 On Tiridates, see Karras-Klapproth 1988, p. 179–183.
- 54 Sakastan played a significant role in the history of Zoroastrianism, see, e.g., Gnoli 1993.
- 55 See Bosworth 1999, p. 4, n. 9; Shahbazi 2005.
- 56 Back 1978, 281.
- 57 Alram, Gyselen 2003, 21,
- 58 Back 1978, 282–283.
- 59 See Huyse 1999, II, p. 15.
- 60 Remarkably, each of the different language versions gives a different name for Sāsān’s father; in the Greek version it is Arnekan, and in the Persian text Orsig.
- 61 See Pugachenkova 1961, p. 21. On the location of Andēgān, see Chaumont 1975, p. 138–139. Huyse 1999, II, p. 136 (on ŠKZ § 42.6) proposes a location near Maishan which is possible but only for one of the dominions held by Andēgān. The main seat must have been in Khorasan and not in Babylonia.
- 62 Livshits 2010, p. 251; Justi 1895, s.v. Sāsān.
- 63 Humbach, Skjærvø 1983, III1, p. 65 § 80, Parth. I.36, and p. 122–123; Shayegan 2011, p. 14; Frye 1989.
- 64 The coinage of Ardashir I can be divided into three major phases, see Alram and Gyselen 2003; Alram 2007, p. 227–231.
- 65 Alram 2007, p. 235.
- 66 Alram 2007, p. 238. The inscriptions of the “Heir Apparent” coins are similar to those of the coins minted by Farn-Sāsān (Skjærvø in Alram and Gyselen 2003, p. 55–56).
- 67 See Widengren 1971; Wiesehöfer 1987; Daryaee 2009, p. 2–6; 2010.
- 68 Widengren 1971, p. 736.
- 69 Widengren 1971, p. 737–739.
- 70 Translation by Bosworth 1999.
- 71 See a detailed discussion in Alram 2007, p. 232.
- 72 See *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* 38 (ed. Daryaee); Gnoli 1993, p. 10.
- 73 Artabanus II: *quia Hyrcanis Carmaniisque per adfinitatem innexus erat* (Tac. Ann. 6.36.4).
- 74 On Ardashir, King of Sakastan, see ŠKZ § 41 with Huyse 1999, II, p. 131. On Sasanian Sakastan, see ŠKZ § 3.7 with Huyse 1999, I, p. 29–30.
- 75 Humbach, Skjærvø 1983, III1, p. 110. Cf. Agathias 4.24.8.
- 76 ŠKZ § 34 (mpl24, paI 19, grI 42).
- 77 Back 1978, p. 492–495.
- 78 Gnoli 1989, p. 134ff.; 1993.
- 79 Widengren 1971, p. 780.
- 80 *History of the Armenians*, Greek version, 9. Translation after Dodgeon, Lieu 2002, p. 14.
- 81 Translation after Thomson 1978.
- 82 *History of the Armenians*, Greek version 6, ed. Lafontaine.
- 83 See Huyse 1999, II, p. 128.
- 84 *History of the Armenians*, Greek version 6, ed. Lafontaine.
- 85 Vehsachan is usually identified with the Kushan king Vasudewa, but this seems too far-fetched a speculation.
- 86 Translation after Thomson 1978. Moses’s account is based on Agathangelos’s *History of the Armenians* §§24–36.
- 87 Daryaee 2009, p. 10–13.
- 88 On Pābag see: Huyse 1999, II, p. 14–15.
- 89 *Quam ob rem numinis eum vice venerantur et colunt ea usque propagatis honoribus ut ad nostri memoriam non nisi Arsacides is sit, quisquam in suscipiendo regno cunctis antepontatur, et in qualibet civili concertatione, quae adsidue apud eos eveniunt, velut sacrilegium quisque caveat ne dextra sua Arsaciden arma gestantem feriat vel privatum*. Translation by J.C. Rolfe.
- 90 Drijvers 1999, p. 195.
- 91 Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians*, Greek version 7 (Dodgeon, Lieu 2002, 13).
- 92 See Huyse 1999 II, p. 152–154.
- 93 See MacKenzie 1993, p. 106–108.

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From Terror to Tactical Usage: Elephants in the Partho-Sasanian Period*

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Clear examples of the elephant's connection with kingship in the Iranian world come from the literary and iconographic evidence of the Sasanian era sources. This is interesting, as it is assumed that it was in Late Antiquity that Zoroastrianism was established as an organised religious tradition. It is according to this same tradition (through the evidence of Pahlavi texts) that elephants are classified as demonic beasts.¹ Consequently, a dichotomy exists about this fabulous animal in royal and clerical circles. This paper concentrates on the numismatic and textual evidence, suggesting that there is much continuity in the use of elephants between the Parthian and the Sasanian periods. It is further posited that elephants were not only important as a symbol of kingship, but also that their demonic outward appearance was used against the opponents of the Parthians and the Sasanians, namely the Roman empire.

Two sets of textual evidence for the use of elephants by the Sasanians are dated to the third century AD. Both literary sources are suspect, but come from divergent traditions. Ardaxšīr (Ardashir) Pābagān, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, is mentioned as having used war elephants against the Romans under Severus Alexander. Alexander addresses the Senate in his victory speech (*Historia Augusta* 56.2–3):

Conscript Fathers, we have conquered the Persians. There is no need of lengthy rhetoric; you should know, however, this much, namely, what their arms were, and what their array. First of all, there were seven hundred elephants provided with turrets and archers and great loads of arrows. Of these we captured thirty, we have left two hundred slain upon the field, and we have led eighteen in triumph.²

It is true that perhaps the *Historia Augusta* is using established literary themes when mentioning the war between the Persians and the Romans, borrowing from the wars of Darius III and Alexander III of Macedon, where elephants were used.³ Still, I think this testimony is worth some attention, as there are other sources that point to the third century for the use of elephants as war machines by the Sasanians. In the *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*), Pābag, instead of dreaming of a white elephant, dreams:

Sāsān was riding a war elephant, and in his hand was an Indian sword ...⁴

The connection between Iran and India is clear here as both the elephant and the sword point to India. But one can argue that the *Shahnameh* is a late source, perhaps reflecting a late Sasanian use of the elephant as a beast of war. Another piece of textual evidence comes from the Middle Persian *Kārnāmag ī Ardāxšīr ī Pābagān* (*The Testament of Ardašīr, son of Pābag*), a story about the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Ardashir I. In this famous text, parts of which are studied by all students of Middle Persian, there appears the episode of the three dreams of Pābag, the local ruler of Pārs or Persis. On the second night the following dream was made manifest (KAP I.9):

Another night he saw in this manner that Sasan is sitting on an adorned white elephant and everyone in the country is standing around him and all are saluting him and worshipping and praising him ...⁵

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Figure 4.1: Lower panel of the Arch of Galerius (after Canepa 2009)

Pābag asks his dream interpreters to decode its meaning (KAP I.13):

The dream interpreters said that that person whom you saw in these dreams, either he or from the offspring of that man, someone will become the king of the world, since the sun and a white adorned elephant (symbolize) bravery and power and victory ...⁶

Here we do not have a war elephant, but rather a white elephant which in this context is associated with regal power, a notion that comes from India.⁷

Shapur I (240–270 AD) may also have used elephants in his war with the Roman Emperor Valerian. This we hear at least from the Persian side, where in the *Book of Kings*, Shapur faced Baranush/Varanush/Valaranus/Valerian in battle in 259 AD in the following manner:

Drums and trumpets were sounded on each side, and the new Persian king, stationed in the centre of his troops, felt the thrill of battle. There was such a wailing of trumpets and clashing

of Indian bells that the moon and the vault of the heavens shook; there were war drums strapped to the elephants, and their thundering noise carried for two miles.⁸

The battle takes place on a plain which the text calls *altouyaneh* (northern Mesopotamia/Armenia?), where Valerian is defeated and captured, according to the text (Davis p. 575). Here we see that elephants are used as a means of terrorising the Roman forces, something that we shall encounter in the Roman sources as well.

In the late third and fourth centuries AD, as the Sasanians and Romans faced one another, elephants were continually used by the Sasanian forces. This time we have information from the Roman side, when a heavy defeat was inflicted on the Persians and the king's wife captured during the battle between Galerius and Narseh in 298 AD. The Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki commemorates his victory. On it both rulers are shown facing one another.⁹ Two panels depict elephants used by the Sasanians being exhibited as part of the gifts sent to the emperor by the Sasanians.¹⁰

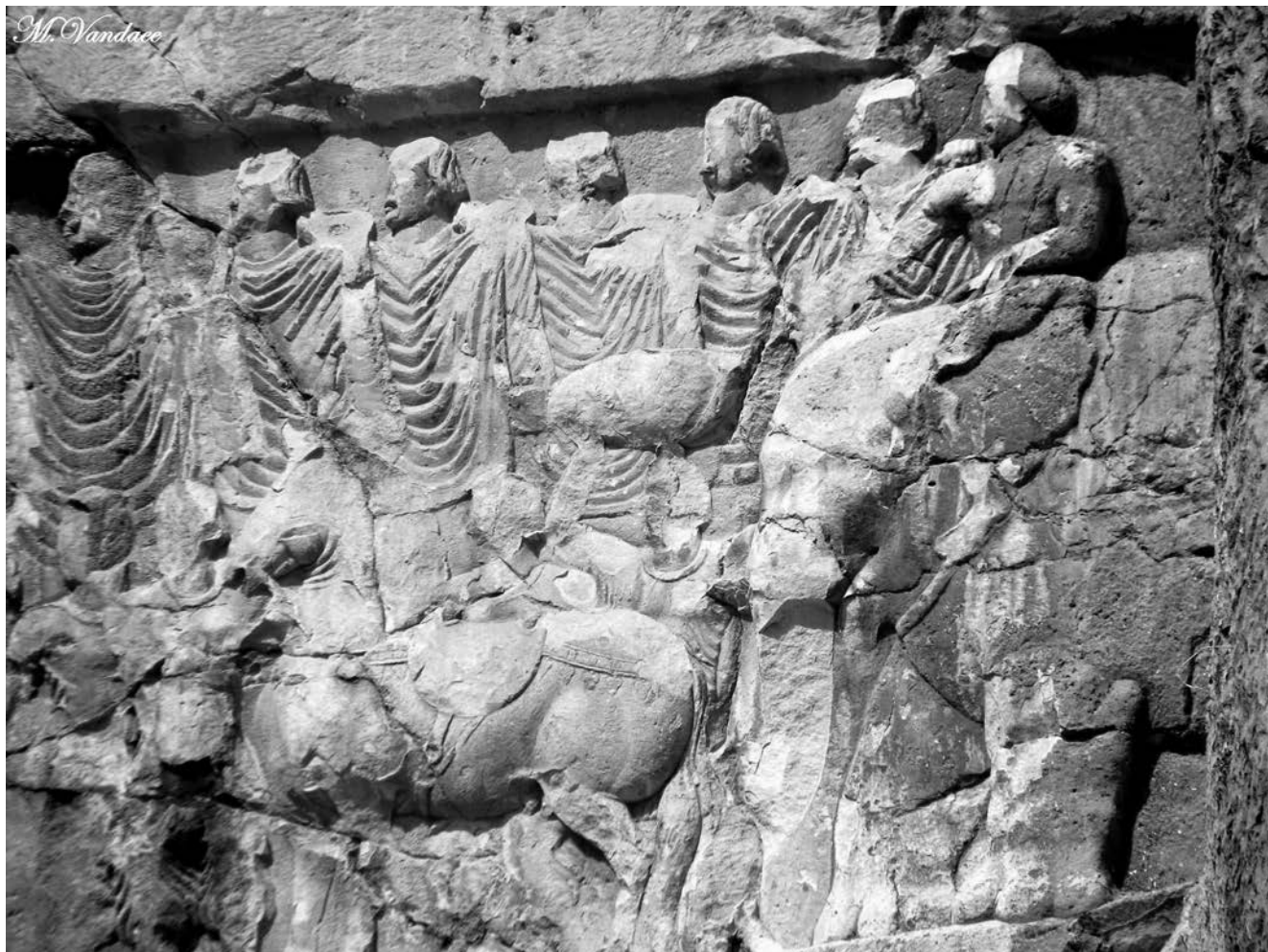


Figure 4.2: Persian elephant corps at Bishapur (Photo by M. Vandaei)

But in the fourth century the Sasanians struck back, and again, elephants were used by the Sasanian army. During the reign of Shapur II (309–379 AD), when Nisibis was put under siege (337/338, 346, 350 AD), the use of the beast is mentioned (Julian's *Orations* 2.63b/66a).

Ammianus Marcellinus is another important source for elephants and the Late Antique Iranian army. In his description of the war between Shapur II and Julian, he states that the Persians appeared at a location called Maranga, where the Persian general of the cavalry, Meren (Mehran?), along with the king's two sons came to battle. The Persian army is described thus (Amm. Marc. XXIV.6.8):

The Persians opposed to us serried bands of mail-clad horsemen in such close order that the gleam of moving bodies covered with densely fitting plates of iron dazzled the eyes of those who looked upon them, while the whole throng of horse was protected by coverings of leather. The cavalry was backed up by companies of infantry, who, protected by oblong, curved shields covered with wickerwork and raw hides, advanced in very close order. Behind these were

elephants, looking like walking hills, and, by the movements of their enormous bodies, they threatened destruction to all who came near them, dreaded as they were from past experience.¹¹

It is interesting that elephants were used by the Sasanians in the Caucasus, especially in Armenia. In the fifth century, Armenia suffered terribly from Persian assaults and many of its nobles perished in 451 AD at the battle of Avarayr.¹² The war was waged by order of the king of kings, Yazdigird II, but the architect behind it was the *Wuzurg-framadār*, Mihr-Narseh. Elishe mentions the large Persian army's march to Armenia with many "companies of elephants" (Elishe, p. 140). The Persian attack formation was arranged thus (Elishe p. 114):

He summoned many of the generals under his authority and ordered them to bring forward the companies of elephants. These he divided into various groups, and he assigned to each elephant three thousand armed men in addition to all the other troops.¹³



Figure 4.3: Tāq-i Būstān (Photo by Ali Matin)

Thus, as time went on, we begin to understand the way in which elephant formations were organised in the Sasanian period and how they were used in battle against their enemies. Images of elephants and their use in Sasanian hunting grounds (Tāq-i Būstān) are best known from the time of Xusrō (Khusrau) II (590–628 CE), and as we shall see below, Perso-Arabic texts provide evidence for their appearance at the court of the most opulent king of the Persians.

The most detailed information on the use of elephants by the Sasanian military comes from the time of Yazdigird III at the battle of Qadisiyyah in 634 AD. Here we are given a full treatment of the tactical use of elephants in various ways by the Sasanian forces. By the seventh century elephants were not only used for direct attack, but also as the centre of operations for command and logistics. The number of elephants at the battle of Qadisiyyah is uncertain as there are variant traditions, but one account has it that some thirty elephants were used by Rustam Farrokhzād, the Sasanian general. The elephants were divided into three sections,

eighteen at the centre and fifteen on the two wings.¹⁴ But it is said that field commanders also stood on elephants,¹⁵ surveying the battle. The most interesting information is the number of people who were on the elephants (Tabari Events of Year 14):

They confronted the elephants so that the drivers turned them in another direction. Every elephant was ridden by twenty men.¹⁶

This number seems too high, but it suggests that at least several people were stationed on the elephants during the war. Needless to say, the Muslims found a way to defeat the Sasanian army with their elephants, which ushered in the end of the Sasanian Empire. Still, elephants continued to be used in warfare, a practice which was revived under the Qaznavids in the tenth century.

The use of elephants as a symbol of kingship and as a weapon of war has a longer history with which the numismatic evidence can aid us.

From the Achaemenids to Alexander III and his successors

We know that the Achaemenids used elephants in their army, no doubt as a result of Darius's venture into India. According to Arrian, at Gaugamela Darius III used fifteen elephants in battle against the Macedonian forces:

In front of Darius's royal squadron of cavalry stood the elephants and fifty chariots. (Arrian, Book III.11)

With Alexander III of Macedon and his successors, elephants are used and appear on coinage as well. Alexander is shown on a silver coin battling the Indian king Porus, who is sitting on an elephant. This is part of a larger series of silver coins. In addition, a gold coin appeared a few years ago bearing a riderless elephant on the reverse, which has been attributed by some scholars to the same series.¹⁷ The most important coin to compare in iconographic terms with this gold coin is that of Ptolemy I of Egypt (305–283 BC), where on the obverse Alexander is shown wearing an elephant scalp. But the meaning of this portrait is unclear, perhaps referring to the conquest of India.

Parthia: The Missing Link

The most comprehensive work on the use of elephants in the ancient Iranian world is by Michael B. Charles who states "... one might well ask why the Parthians did not use elephants for military purposes; or at least why they were not attracted to the royal symbolism which the elephant seems to have had for the [Sasanians]."¹⁸ But it is in the Parthian period that we have both representational and literary evidence for the importance and use of elephants. The Greco-Bactrians placed



Figure 4.4: Bronze coin of Demetrius I (© The Trustees of the British Museum)



Figure 4.5: Bronze coin of Mithradates I (©The Trustees of the British Museum)

elephants on their coinage, for example that of Demetrius I (c. 200–180 BC).¹⁹

It is possible that it was with the Mithradates I's (138/136 BC) defeat of the Greco-Bactrian ruler Eucratides that elephants began to appear on Parthian coinage. Some of the bronze coins of Mithradates I show an elephant on the reverse accompanied by the inscription "of the Great King, Arsaces", perhaps in commemoration of his conquest of Bactria. This is thus the first time that we see elephants struck on Parthian coinage of eastern mints, perhaps symbolising rule over Bactria.

Similar literary evidence is also furnished both by classical and Parthian sources. The classical source is from an event in the first century AD, namely the Battle of Rhandeia in 62 AD. The Roman general Paetus had taken over the Armenian command and wanted to place Armenia under direct Roman rule.²⁰ His forces in the valley of Arsania or Murad Su were repeatedly defeated and were placed under siege. Before Corbulo was able to bring help from Syria, Paetus made a humiliating treaty with the Parthian king of kings, Vologases (Wālxš), in which he agreed to evacuate Armenia. The Romans agreed to build a bridge across the Arsania (Murad Su) for the Arsacids before their departure.²¹

Tacitus, our main source for this event, provides some very interesting details on the mode of humiliation and the representation of Parthian power over the Romans. He states:²²

Meanwhile Paetus threw a bridge over the river Arsania ... apparently with the view of facilitating his march. It was the Parthians, however, who had required this, as an evidence of their victory; for the bridge was of use to them ...

Furthermore, the Roman forces were made to march under a "yoke" (Lat. *iugum*), which was part of the Roman cultural imagery of subjugation. While the Romans were on the march, the Armenians took some of them as slaves and even took the clothes off their backs for further humiliation. But what symbolically made the event momentous was the king of kings' march over the bridge in the following manner (Tacitus, *Annals* XV.15):

Seated himself on an elephant, he [Vologases] crossed the river Arsania, while those next to his person rushed through it at the utmost speed of their horses; for a rumour had gained ground that the bridge would give way, through the trickery of its builders. But those who ventured to go on it found it to be firm and trustworthy.

The other literary evidence comes from the Parthian epic, *The Testament of Zarēr* (*Āyādgār ī Zarērān*), which is a tale about the war between the Iranians who had become Zoroastrian and the Turānians, who were keeping their pagan religion and challenging the new converts. The scene of war and the way the Iranian army is depicted are similar to that of Ammianus's description of the Sasanian army (ĀZ 27–31):

Then the army (*Kārwān*) was on the move. Elephant drivers went to the elephants and the horse groomers to the horses and tower-watcher to the tower. There are many swords of Rustam, many quivers full of lances, many bright armours and many four-fold armours. The army (*Kārwān*) of Iranshahr is such that its noise reaches the sky and its vibration to hell. When they move the road will be cut and the water of the rivers will be in commotion that for one month it cannot be drunk and for fifty days it will not be clear ...²³

Based on the evidence furnished, we can draw several conclusions. First, elephants were used as a psychological weapon of terror against their enemies by successive ancient Iranian dynasties. Early on, they were used as a sort of tank of the ancient world. This trend appears to have been the case from the Achaemenid period onwards in the Iranian domains. On the other hand, by the beginning of the first century AD, the symbolic nature of elephants as a representation of kingship is evident in Iran. This notion, however, was inherited from India and the Indo-Iranian borderland kingdoms (the Greco-Bactrians). Secondly, elephants became more important tactically as time passed in Late Antique Iran. The early Sasanians may have used these beasts as a scare tactic, but by the late Sasanian period they were more than a mere psychological weapon against the enemy's army. Elephants were then used as a logistical tool, from which the battle scene was surveyed by the army commanders and the movements of forces observed. For the very same reason their use outlasted the ancient Iranian dynasties and continued into pre-Modern times in Iran.

Notes

- 1 H.-P. Schmidt 1980, p. 215; M. Moazami 2005, p. 313.
- 2 *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, 56.2–3: *Persas, patres conscripti, vicimus. longae eloquentiae opus non est, tantum scire debetis, quae illorum arma fuerint, qui apparatus. iam primum elephanti septingenti idemque turriti cum sagittariis et onere sagittarum. ex his triginta cepimus, ducenti interfecti iacent, decem et octo perduximus.*
- 3 M.B. Charles 2007, p. 306–308. For a survey of Late Antiquity, see P. Rance 2003, p. 355–384.
- 4 *The Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. D. Davis 2007, p. 530.
- 5 F. Grenet 2003, transcription p. 56: *any šab-ēw ēdōn dīd čiyōn ka sāsān pad pīl-ēw ārāstag ī spēd nišāst estād ud hark ē andar kišwar pērāmōn ī sāsān estēnd ud namāz awiš barēnd ud stāyīšn ud āfrīn hamē kunēnd.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 56: *xwamn-vizārān guft kū ān kē ēn xwamn padi-iš dīd ōy ayāb az frazandān ī ān mard kas-ēw ō pādixšāyīh ī gēhān rasēd čē xwaršēd ud pīl ī spēd ī ārāstag čērīh ud tuwānīgīh ud pērōzīh.*
- 7 T. Daryaee 2014.
- 8 Davis, *ibid.*, p. 575.
- 9 M.P. Canepa 2009, p. 93–94.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- 11 Amm. Marc. XXIV, 6.8: *contra haec Persae obiecerunt instructas cataphractorum equitum turmas sic confertas, ut lamminis coaptati corporum flexus splendore praestringerent occurrentes obtutus, operimentis scorteis equorum multitudine omni defensa, quorum in subsidiis manipuli locati sunt peditum, contexti scutis oblongis et curvis, quae texta vimine et coriis crudis gestantes densius se commovebant. post hos elephanti gradientium collium specie motuque inmanium corporum propinquantibus exitium intentabant documentis praeteritis formidati.*
- 12 For the circumstances and sources see S.J. McDonough 2006, p. 74–75.
- 13 Elishē, trans. R.W. Thomson, 1982, p. 166–167.
- 14 *The History of Al-Tabari*, trans. Y. Friedmann 1992, p. 62–63.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 17 F. Holt and O. Bopearachchi 2011, p. 10–11. The authenticity of this gold coin has, however, been questioned by many scholars: for a review of Holt and Bopearachchi's book and an overview of the views of other scholars, see R. Bracey (2011).
- 18 M.B. Charles, *op. cit.*, p. 339.
- 19 E. Errington and V. Sarkhosh Curtis 2007, p. 51, fig. 6.
- 20 A.D.H. Bivar 1983, p. 84.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- 22 Tacitus, *Annals*, XV.15.
- 23 *uš kārwan ēwarz kunēnd ud pīlbān pad pīl rawēnd ud stōrbān pad stōr rawēnd ud wardyūndār pad wardyūn šawēnd was ēstēd *šafšanj ī rōdstahm was kantigr ī purr tigr ud was zrēh ī rōšn ud was zrēh ī0020ahārkard ud kārāwān ī ērānšhar ēdōn bē ēstēnd ka wāng bē ō asmān šawēd ud pattān bē ō dušox šawēd pad rāh kū šawēnd widarag ēdōn bē brīnēnd ud rōd-iz āb bē šēbēnd ī tā ēw māh āb xwardān nē šāyēd tā*

panjāh rōz rōšn nē bawēd; for the transcription see B. Gheiby 1999, p. 2–3; for the reading of *šafšanj* see T. Daryaee 2005, p. 95–98.

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Remarks on the Location of the Province of Parthia in the Sasanian Period*

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Compared with later eras, the historical geography of Iran during the Sasanian period has not attracted the attention of scholars. This is possibly due to the fact that, for a long time, the available sources for this period were either post-Sasanian or else came from countries neighbouring the Sasanian empire. Based on these sources, more than a century ago J. Olshausen and J. Marquart illuminated Iranian geography during this dynasty. Fortunately, in recent decades the discovery of Sasanian inscriptions, coins, seals and seal impressions and their scholarly publication have provided valuable sources for studying Iran's geography under the Sasanians. However, the ongoing publication of these new sources has not yet been adequately used to shed fresh light on Sasanian historical geography. Since the location of the province of Parthia in this period is controversially identified in modern studies, the present paper aims at illustrating the location of the province of Parthia in the Sasanian period by taking advantage of these sources. It is almost superfluous to remark that ambiguity about the geographical location of Parthia not only hinders clear description of the administrative geography of this and other related provinces, but also it has an impact on the description of historical events and, in turn, the analysis of their consequences.

The province of Parthia (Παρθία) was one of the prominent regions in the historical development of ancient Iran. In the Achaemenid period and in Old Persian, Parθava was an important province (satrapy), which appears for the first time along with other provinces in inscriptions.

Darius I (522–486 BC), for instance, named Parthia in his Bisitun inscription along with the satrapies of Drangiana, Areia, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana and Gandara.¹ This is similar to the location of Parthia in Herodotus's *Histories*. In a list the latter offered about the satrapies during the reign of Darius, he included the Parthians, Chorasmians, Sogdians and Areioi as a single satrapy.² Thus, according to these sources from the Achaemenid period on the Parθava, it can be concluded that the province ended in Gorgān to the north-west, Khwārazm to the north, Sogdiana to the north-east, Balkh to the east, Herat to the south-east and Kirmān to the south. Its area approximately equalled today's Khurāsān province and the southern part of Turkmenistan. Achaemenid sources and Herodotus's information on the location of Parthia in the Achaemenid period have been accepted widely by modern scholars.³

Although sometimes, as under Alexander III of Macedon, Parthia formed a single satrapy along with Gorgān,⁴ it can be surmised that Arsacid Parthia occupied the same location as Achaemenid Parthia. This idea was quite clearly mentioned in the *Geography* of Strabo, as he distinguished between Parthia as a province and Parthia as an empire, and placed the province in the region of modern-day Khurāsān in north-eastern Iran.⁵

Most historians, however, both past and present, usually consider that the same was true of Parthia in the Sasanian period as well, and believe that this is the very area which was later called Khurāsān.⁶ It is even stated that the

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elimination and demise of the Parthian language was a process that started with the rise to power of the Sasanians, and its abolition was so thorough that nowadays no dialect can be found in Khurāsān that retains any trace of the Parthian language.⁷ However, it is interesting that according to linguistic studies, Parthian was one of the north-western Iranian languages (and Middle Persian belongs to the south-western group).⁸ Since the only linguistic evidence remaining comes from Middle Parthian, which coincides with both the Arsacid and Sasanian periods, there remains an unanswered question: how is it possible for the province of Parthia to be located in north-eastern Iran in the period when Middle Iranian languages were spoken (i.e. the Parthian and Sasanian periods), while its language is considered to be one of the north-western languages of Iran?⁹

The remaining sources and evidences from the Sasanian era refute the idea that the province of Parthia in this period was located in north-eastern Iran. From among the local and contemporary sources from the early Sasanian period, the important trilingual inscription of Shapur I (240–272 AD) on the Ka‘be-ye Zardusht (ŠKZ) at Naqsh-e Rostam in Fārs (Persis) provides the most illuminating data regarding the administrative divisions of Iran at that time. Its list of provinces defines the extent of the Sasanian empire under Shapur I in clockwise geographic enumeration. The empire’s north-eastern provinces in this inscription consist of Gorgān, Marw, Harēw, Abaršahr, Kirmān, Sagestān, Tūrān etc.¹⁰ All the provinces mentioned here were located in eastern Iran, and it should be understood that Abaršahr is mentioned as a province, not as a city. As the inscription lists before and after Abaršahr other provinces, the position of which is known, the location of Abaršahr can be determined to a large extent. Thus we may definitively place Abaršahr in the north-east of present-day Iran, which comprised most of Khurāsān province, and which ended in Gorgān to the north-west, to the north-east in Marw, to the east in Harēw, to the south-east in Sagestān, and to the south in Kirmān.

The list of the eastern provinces from the Ka‘be-ye Zardusht inscription is confirmed by other sources. Tabarī, for instance, when referring to the campaign of Ardashir I (224–240 AD), founder of the Sasanian empire, in eastern Iran, named Sagestān, Gorgān, Abaršahr, Marw and Khwārazm as eastern provinces of Iran.¹¹ Also later on, during the reign of Khusrau I (531–579 AD), when the Sasanian empire was divided into four *Kusts* or quarters, Abaršahr was listed along with Herat, Marw, Balkh and so on as provinces governed by the *spāhbed* (commander) of the east (*xwarāsān*).¹² According to Islamic geographers, Nishāpūr (the capital of Abaršahr), Herat, Marw and Balkh were four important cities of Khurāsān, each of which was at some time the capital of Khurāsān.¹³ Thus, based on the inscription of Ka‘be-ye Zardusht, which is also confirmed by literary sources, it can be stated that there was no province called Parthia in the Khurāsān region during the early Sasanian period.

In the rest of the inscription, the provinces of Parthia and Abaršahr are differentiated from one another, each being separately mentioned.¹⁴ There are also other sources and sufficient evidence left from the early Sasanian period which when pieced together, allow us to determine the location of this province. In his inscription at Ka‘be-ye Zardusht Shapur I lists Parthia as one of the provinces of his empire in the order as stated before (Middle Persian version): Pārs, Pahlaw, Khuzistān, Mēšān and so on.¹⁵ Kirdēr, the prominent Zoroastrian priest in the early Sasanian period, commissioned an inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam, which lists the provinces in the following order: Pārs, Pahlaw, Āsuristān, Mēšān and so on.¹⁶ Manichean writings, which provide evidence for their rituals in Abaršahr, Pārs, Khuzistān and Parthia, confirm what is found in the inscriptions.¹⁷ Additionally, Ammianus Marcellinus (fourth century AD) mentions Parthia after Persis and before Kirmān. According to Ammianus, Parthia was located to the north of Persis.¹⁸

Thanks to these sources, a clearer picture of the position of Parthia in the early Sasanian era emerges. By examining its location in the inscriptions with respect to that of other provinces whose location is known, one can assert that at this time Parthia was located in the central part of the Iranian plateau, neighbouring Pārs and Khuzistān: that is to say, it was bounded by Pārs to the south, by Khuzistān to the south-west, by Media to the west and north-west, by the Alborz Mountains to the north, by Abaršahr to the north-east, and by Kirmān to the east.¹⁹

Since the administrative organisation in the early Sasanian era was not that much different from that under the late Arsacids, one may assume that the location given in the early Sasanian sources for Parthia is a reflection of administrative divisions in late Arsacid times. It has been suggested that the name Abaršahr was attributed to the north-east of Iran after the Parni tribes settled there, and the name Parthia was attributed after the gradual transfer of Parthian capitals and settlements to the west of Iran.²⁰ We know that the central parts of Iran were under the rule of Arsacid emperor Ardashir (Artabanus) IV (213–224 AD), and that Hamadan, Qom and Ray were probably the first cities conquered by Sasanian king Ardashir I after his defeat of Artabanus.²¹ This can be interpreted as showing the importance of Parthia for the Persian founder of the Sasanian dynasty, an importance which is also evident in the later sources. As mentioned earlier, Shapur I in his Ka‘be-ye Zardusht inscription lists the province of Parthia in second place after Pārs.²² According to Shapur, Parthia was also the second province chosen for settlement by Roman prisoners of war.²³ Parthia was also mentioned in second place after Pārs in the inscription of Abnun, who was in charge of the ceremonies of Shapur’s harem. This is also the case in the above-mentioned inscription of Kirdēr.²⁴ The importance of Parthia was reflected even in the writings of the Roman author Ammianus Marcellinus in the fourth century

Table 5.1: Regions of *fahla* according to early Islamic authors.

Regions	Azarbaijan	Māsabadhān	Mihrajānqadhaq	Kirmānshāh	Dīnawar	Nihāwand	Hamadan	Qazvīn	Ray	Qom	Isfahan
<i>Authors</i>											
Ibn al-Muqaffa	■					■	■		■		■
al-Khwārazmī	■					■	■		■		■
al-Dīnawarī		■	■	■	■	■	■				
Ibn al-Faqīh		■	■	■	■	■	■			■	
Ibn Khurrahābih		■	■		■	■	■	■	■		■
al-Mas‘ūdī	■	■			■	■	■				
Hamza al-Isfahānī	■					■	■		■		■
al-Maqdisī		■	■		■	■	■				
Yāgut		■	■	■	■	■	■			■	

AD. It is worth mentioning that Sasanian emperor Narseh (293–302 AD) in his Paikuli inscription mostly referred to Persians and Parthians when listing those who played a role in the early years of his reign.²⁵ It must be noted that determining the exact location of events related to Parthia in these inscriptions depends heavily on the geographical location of Parthia. Clearly where in the Abnun inscription Romans attack (Pārs and) Parthia, the writer did not want to say that the Romans invaded north-eastern Iran.

Gay, Goyman and Ray, which were mentioned in the Ka‘be-ye Zardusht inscription and on late Sasanian seals,²⁶ were located in this area. Having compared these regions with those cited on seals of the late Sasanian era and in early Islamic books, it can be concluded that they correspond to present-day Isfahan, Qom and Ray respectively. Ray, headquarters of the Parthian Mehrān family,²⁷ and Gay (Arabic Jay, later Isfahan), headquarters of the Vaspuragan (seven Parthian nobles),²⁸ were located in central and north-central Iran. There was, however, no mention of Isfahan in the Ka‘be-ye Zardusht inscription. But Isfahan appears in Kirdēr’s inscriptions at Sar Mashhad and Naqsh-i Rostam, written some thirty years after Shapur,²⁹ as a province along with Parthia, Persis and so on.

Does this indicate a change in the administrative divisions of Sasanian Iran which led to Parthia’s expansion to western parts? What makes this likely is that according to Sasanian-based Arabic and New Persian sources, in the late Sasanian era the Parthian region³⁰ not only embraced central and north-central areas of Iran but also extended to western parts of its plateau.³¹ Based on these sources, a large part of central and western Iran was called *fahla* or *pahla*. The earliest source in this respect is that of Ibn al-Muqaffa, which

is mentioned in *al-Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, based on which the regions of Isfahan, Ray, Hamadan, Māh-i Nihāwand and Azarbaijan were called *fahla*.³² The same evidence can also be found in the works of al-Khwārazmī and Hamza al-Isfahānī.³³ In *al-akhbār-al-tiwāl*, al-Dīnawarī, without mentioning the name *fahla*, considered the realm of Ardashir/Artabanus (presumably Ardashir IV, the last Arsacid king) to be confined to *jibāl* – i.e. Nihāwand, Dīnawar, Hamadan, Māsabadhān, Mihrajānqadhaq and Hulwān (Kirmānshāh and Qasr-i Shīrīn).³⁴ However, referring to the *pahlav* regions in his book entitled *Mukhtasar Kitāb al-buldān*, Ibn al-Faqīh, Dīnawarī’s contemporary, believed that they were the same areas mentioned in Dīnawarī, in addition to Qom.³⁵ In his book, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-mamālik*, Ibn Khurrahābih holds that *pahlav* incorporated Ray, Isfahan, Hamadan, Dīnawar, Nihāwand, Mihrajānqadhaq, Māsabadhān and Qazvīn.³⁶ Al-Maqdisī in his book entitled *Ahsan al-taqāsīm* believed that the *pahlav* region encompassed Hamadan, Māsabadhān, Mihrajānqadhaq, Nihāwand and Dīnawar.³⁷ Al-Bīrūnī in his work *Āsār al-bāqia* considered that the land included Isfahan and Ray.³⁸ Eventually, Yāgut in *Mu‘jam al-buldān* assumed the land of *fahla* to comprise Hamadan, Māsabadhān, Qom, Māh-i Basra (Nihāwand), Sīmara (Mihrajānqadhaq), Māh-i Kufā (Dīnawar), and Kirmānshāh.³⁹

Most of the Muslim historians who referred to *fahla* also stated that in this region *fahlavī* was a common language. Even today, some old poems known as *fahlavīyāt* can still be found in Islamic sources. The available examples mostly come from the areas which were considered to be part of *fahlav*, such as Nihāwand, Avroman, Ray, Hamadan, Isfahan and Qazvīn. According to new studies, the available

poems in *fahlavī* reveal the characteristics of oral literature. Thus we may say that the *fahlavī* poems continued the oral traditions of the Parthian *gosans* and Sasanian minstrels, following the principles of Middle Iranian prosody. The *fahlavīyāt* have certain linguistic affinities with Parthian, although in their existing forms they have been much influenced by New Persian.⁴⁰

Based on the aforementioned statements, and relying on Persian and Arabic sources, *fahla* areas can be summed up in Table 5.1.

Now, if one compares this information with the list offered in early Sasanian inscriptions, some differences come to the surface. These are the result of changes in both the position and extent of Parthia in the late Sasanian and early Islamic periods. Consequently, Parthia covered the western part of Iranian plateau. All the authors cited above described Hamadan and Nihāwand as parts of Parthia. Moreover, regardless of the differences among Islamic writers as to the boundaries of *fahla*, they all unanimously believed that Khurāsān was not part of Parthia, a view which is supported by the early Sasanian inscriptions.

To sum up, the province of Parthia in the Achaemenid period included the north-eastern parts of Iran. Nevertheless, there is evidence indicating that in the late Arsacid period the term was applied to the central and north-central regions of Iran. Sources from the early Sasanian period categorically demonstrate that Parthia was located in this part of Iranian plateau. However, Islamic sources reveal that in the late Sasanian period, Parthia now encompassed in addition the western part of Iran. In other words, from the Achaemenids to the Sasanians, there was a change in the location of Parthia from north-east to western Iran. Having considered the evidence and reasons set out above, it can be concluded that, if Middle Parthian has features of the north-western Iranian languages, this is due to the fact that the Parthian region was located in the northern and western part of Iranian plateau during those times.

Notes

- 1 Schmitt 1991, p. 49–50.
- 2 Herodotus 3.93 (tr. p. 121, 123).
- 3 Cf. e.g. Dandamaev 1989, p. 85.
- 4 Debevoise 1938, p. 7.
- 5 Strabo 11.9.1 (tr. p. 271, 273); cf. Drijvers 1998, p. 282. Later references in Strabo (*ibid.*), however, apparently show that during the Arsacid period, Parthia extended to central parts of Iran with the capital city Hekatompylos.
- 6 Cf. Lazard 1995, p. 50; Pourshariati 2008, p. 4, 6, 42, 222, 263, 275, 392–393, 419–420.
- 7 Lazard 1995, p. 50. Sundermann (1989, p. 115) explains the points as follows: “Ihrer ostiranischen Heimat zum Trotz gehört die parthische Sprache zu den nordwestiranischen Mundarten und Sprachen. In Sprachen und Mundarten dieser Gruppe müssen daher die Verwandten des Parthischen gesucht werden, wenn auch keine derselben sich bisher als Nachkomme des Parthischen hat identifizieren lassen.”

- 8 Sundermann *loc. cit.*
- 9 Eastern Iranian languages were spoken in present-day Afghanistan and beyond.
- 10 Huyse 1999, p. 23–24. The name of Abaršahr appears in the Middle Persian version as *hamag Abaršahr*. Abaršahr also appeared on Sasanian coins with the mint abbreviation AP; cf. Schindler 2006, p. 675.
- 11 Nöldeke 1879, p. 17; cf. also Alram 2007, p. 233.
- 12 Cf. e.g. Y‘aqūbī 1883, p. 201.
- 13 Marquart 1901, p. 47; Le Strange 1905, p. 382.
- 14 Bivar (1983, p. 26) stated that it was likely that the Sasanians had intentionally built Abaršahr apart from Parthia. There is, however, no evidence to confirm such a claim. The available sources mostly indicate that the Iranian name of Abaršahr was applied to the Achaemenid satrapy of Parthia after the settlement of Parni tribes in the region: cf. Henning 1958, p. 95; Brunner 1983, p. 767; Shahbazi 1389/2011, p. 243–244.
- 15 Huyse 1999, p. 22–23.
- 16 Gignoux 1991, p. 61, 71.
- 17 Sarkarati 1378/1999, p. 149, 157–170, 177–178.
- 18 Ammianus Marcellinus 23.6.14 (tr. p. 357).
- 19 A brief description of this location is provided by Brunner 1983, p. 752–753; cf. also Gyselen 1989, p. 73.
- 20 Brunner 1983, p. 767.
- 21 Schippmann 1990, p. 16.
- 22 Huyse 1999, p. 22–23.
- 23 Huyse 1999, p. 43.
- 24 Tavoosi & Frye 1989, p. 25–38; Gignoux 1991, p. 71.
- 25 Skjærvø 1983, p. 29, 31, 34, 43, 63–64, 67–68.
- 26 Gyselen 1989, p. 73.
- 27 Marquart 1901, p. 124.
- 28 Marquart 1901, p. 29.
- 29 Gignoux 1991, p. 61, 71.
- 30 Persian form: *pahla*, Arabic: *fahla*, *bahla*, cf. Lazard 1995, p. 50.
- 31 Olshausen (1876) cited most of these sources and their contents about the geography of Parthia; cf. also Tafazzolī 1999, p. 158–162.
- 32 Ibn al-Nadīm 1953/1974, p. 15.
- 33 al-Khwārazmī 1895, p. 117; Hamza al-Isfahānī 1412/1992, p. 23.
- 34 al-Dinawarī 1969, p. 40; also cf. al-Mas‘ūdī in *Muruj al-Dhahab* (1861–1877, p. 133) who calls the Arsacids the kings of *jibāl* i.e. Dīnawar, Nihāwand, Hamadan, Māsabadhān and Azarbaijan. Also cf. Tabarī’s *History* (Nöldeke 1879, p. 7) who assumes the Arsacid king Ardawān was king of *jibāl*.
- 35 Ibn al-Faqīh 1885, p. 296.
- 36 Ibn Khuradādhbih 1889, p. 57.
- 37 al-Maqdisī 1906, p. 373–374.
- 38 al-Biruni 1879, p. 34.
- 39 Yāqūt 1397/1977, p. 42.
- 40 Tafazzolī 1999, p. 159.

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The Birth of the Sasanian Monarchy in Western Sources

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The last notable political achievement of Arsacid foreign policy was the peace signed with the Romans in 218 AD.¹ Although some years later Cassius Dio (LXXX 3–4) and Herodian (VI 2, 1–2) wrote about serious trouble on the eastern border of the Roman empire, reporting the murder of Artabanus and Ardashir's ascent to the throne, which should be dated to 224 AD,² the Romans did not immediately realise the revolutionary character of the new Sasanian empire.

The territorial claims (supposedly) advanced by the Persians created apprehension on the Roman side.³ Herodian, who says that he was a contemporary of Artabanus (Hdn VI 2, 7), is very clear on one point at least: a bold protagonist in the Orient, called Artaxerxes/Ardashir, the king of the Iranians, seized power from the Parthians and killed their Great King Artabanus, who wore the double diadem (Hdn VI 2, 1).⁴ These remarks are scanty but correct. The title of *basileus megas* (of Babylonian and Achaemenid origin) was characteristic of the Parthian dynasty but was never officially adopted by the Sasanian kings,⁵ while the double diadem sometimes adorns the king's head in the late Parthian and Elymaian art.⁶

Yet in Roman literary texts there is no single term used to describe the Sasanians, who are generally defined as Persians, Medians or even Parthians (not always for purely rhetorical reasons), even by very competent historians, like Ammianus Marcellinus.⁷ Modern historiography has usually emphasised that his digression about the Persis region, in particular, is very generic and imprecise.⁸ One might even think that Ammianus, who should have been well informed about the difference between Parthians and Sasanians, was not the author of this *excursus*. He was personally present during the campaigns of Constantius II against Shapur II. Moreover, he was a direct witness of the siege of Amida in 359 AD and a contemporary witness of the great Persian expedition of Julian in 363 AD.⁹ Ammianus was a native of Antioch and served with the Roman army as *protector*

(a kind of military attaché): this important position gave him access to secret documents and official letters, and he also participated in delicate missions behind the Roman *limes*. Nevertheless, in his *Histories* we do not find a single reference to the dynastic change in Persia, when Ardashir brought to an end a regime which had lasted five centuries.

How can we explain this surprising omission? Ammianus was an enthusiastic supporter of Julian's aggressive policy against the barbarians. He thought that a strategy mainly based on military containment along the Mesopotamian border was not sufficient to meet the Persian threat. Julian, who was welcomed by the Phoenician community on the eve of the Persian campaign as *barbarorum extincor*, "the terminator of the barbarians",¹⁰ once proclaimed to his troops: *abolenda nobis natio molestissima, cuius in gladiis nondum nostrae propinquitatis exaruit cruor* (H. XXIII 5, 19) – "We must destroy this pernicious people, on whose swords the blood of our relatives is not yet dry." Julian's references to recent Roman defeats clearly alluded to the catastrophic Oriental campaigns of Gordian III, Philip the Arab and Valerian. Julian visited Gordian's tomb at Zaitha, where he celebrated sacrifices in his honour.¹¹ He was anxious to fight and desired to add to his official titles the cognomen *Parthicus*.¹² The Roman emperor represented himself as the avenger of the soldiers killed at Carrhae; the final solution thunders in the threatening words (echoing those of Cato), *abolenda nobis natio*.

Julian, like a tragic actor, was confronted by a host of ill omens: the strange and sudden deaths of soldiers, unexpected thunderbolt strikes and, in particular, the discovery of a huge dead lion pierced by javelins, which the Etruscan haruspices (who used to accompany the Roman emperor in battle) explicitly interpreted as the impending death of *one* king. Without listening to his advisers, Julian rushed against the Persians, led by Shapur II. Ammianus has harsh words for the Persian king; in addition to

describing him (correctly) as an old man, *longaevus ille Sapor* (H. XXVII 12, 1), he calls him *efferatus, truculentus, irritabilis, asperimus, astutus* and *immaniter arrogans*, “enormously arrogant”. Yet the Roman historian knows the meaning of some Sasanian royal titles, such as *saansaan*, “King of Kings” (*šāhān šāh*), and *pirosen*, “victor in wars” (*pērōz*).¹³ In the *Histories*, setting aside the generic digression on the usages and customs of the Persians (H. XXIII 6), which is clearly based on the sixth book of the *Geography* of Ptolemy, there is little information about the Persian nobility or the administration of the Sasanian empire. The short sketch of the Magi and Zoroaster’s religion openly derives from classical Greek sources, such as Herodotus and Plato. Nevertheless, Ammianus never defines the Persians as “barbarians” but adopts the terms *natio* or *gentes*.

In general, the ethnic *Persae* is more commonly used in the *Histories* than *Parthi*. It is important to note that Ammianus links the Parthian dynasty to the Sasanians, about whom, in practice, he has nothing of note to say; as Willem Drijvers correctly pointed out, Ammianus does not actually distinguish between Parthians and Sasanians.¹⁴ He completely omits to explain how the Sasanians came to power in Iran (but was this included in one of the lost books?), and curiously confers on Shapur II the royal title of the deified Arsaces, *Solis frater et Lunae*, “brother of the Sun and Moon”.¹⁵ Ammianus’s historical anachronism is evident when he writes: “Hence they venerate and worship Arsaces as a god, and their regard for him has been carried so far, that even down to the memory of our time (*ad nostri memoriam*) only a man who is of the stock of Arsaces, if there is one anywhere, is preferred to all in mounting the throne.”¹⁶ Ammianus’s principal intent was to prove an historical continuity, and even a genealogical one, between the Parthians and the Sasanians, in order to distort the facts. The falsification is manifest when he affirms that *in his time* only an Arsacid man could ascend to the throne. This misrepresentation of history cannot be casual in Ammianus, and especially in the fourth century AD, when the Roman emperors no longer bore the official title *Parthicus* but the more correct *Persicus/Persikos*.¹⁷

The first emperor to employ the epithet *Persicus* *Maximus* (rather than *Parthicus Maximus*) was Philip the Arab (attested in an inscription from Rome).¹⁸ Philip optimistically celebrated on some of his coins the *pax fundata cum Persis*,¹⁹ although in fact he had to ransom his army and was forced to renounce the Roman protectorate over Hatra and part of Armenia. The Romans tried to conceal the disastrous campaigns of Gordian III, even if in Zonara (XII 17) the memory of the young emperor “falling from his horse” during a pitched battle with the Persians still survives. Santo Mazzarino has shown that the Greco-Roman historiography concerning the Persian wars of the third century, including Ammianus’s account,

is completely altered.²⁰ The historic deformation of the traditional version, the so-called “vulgate”, attributes Gordian’s death to an internal plot of Philip, rather than admitting Shapur’s responsibility.

In Roman inscriptions up to the reign of Probus both *Parthicus* and *Persicus* are attested interchangeably as Roman imperial titles, but from Carus onward, the correct term *Persicus* became popular also in literary texts. If so, why did Julian, along with Ammianus, insist on *Parthici cognomentum*? Julian aimed at revitalising the old Roman anti-Parthian tradition, going back to the battle of Carrhae and to Trajan’s victories over the Parthians, and of course he dreamed of becoming a new Alexander the Great. Julian even confessed, in his letter addressed to Themistios, that he feared that he would not be able to equal the military virtues of Alexander. But were the dream of emulating Alexander and the model of Trajan sufficient to generate a desire to obtain an anachronistic title, thus cancelling the Sasanians from history?

Alain Chauvot, in an important study on the Roman perception of the barbarians, observed that in Julian’s orations we can detect an ambiguous attitude towards the Parthians. In the first panegyric dedicated to Constantius, which was written around 356/7 AD, the “Asiatic” barbarians were deemed as one single Oriental nation that fought first Alexander and then the Romans; the Persians were considered as simply the remains of the Macedonian empire. We find in this text the confusing classical conflation of Medians, Parthians and Persians. The Romans were the natural successors of Alexander in the Persian wars. In the second panegyric for Constantius (358/9 AD), Julian’s opinion rapidly seems to change: he mentions only the Parthians, as though the Sasanians never existed.²¹ It is worth citing a passage from the *Second Oration*, which should be seriously considered in the historiographical debate conducted by many Iranologists on the subject of the Sasanians’ memory (real or presumed) of their Achaemenid past.²² According to Julian, the Sasanians were terribly afraid of being mistaken for Parthians, hence they tried to exalt many aspects deriving from the Achaemenid tradition, such as, for instance, their style of dress and military tactics. Julian describes the Persian siege of Nisibis in 350 AD by the troops of Shapur II (Iul. Or. III 63a-b):

Ἐνταῦθα κοσμεῖ τὴν στρατιὰν τὸν Περσικὸν τρόπον· διασώζουσι γὰρ καὶ ἀπομιμῶνται τὰ Περσικὰ οὐκ ἀξιοῦντες, ἑμοὶ δοκεῖ, Παρθυαῖοι νομίζεσθαι, Πέρσαι δὲ εἶναι προσποιούμενοι. Ταῦτά τοι καὶ στολῇ Μηδικῇ χαιρουσι καὶ ἐς μάχας ἔρχονται ὁμοίως ἐκείνοις ὅπλοις τε ἀγαλλόμενοι τοιοῦτοις καὶ ἐσθήμασιν ἐπιχρύσοις καὶ ἀλουργέσι. Σοφίζονται δὲ ἐντεῦθεν τὸ μὴ δοκεῖν ἀφεστάναι Μακεδόνων, ἀναλαβεῖν δὲ τὴν ἐξ ἀρχαίου βασιλείαν προσήκουσαν. Οὐκοῦν καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ξέρξην μιμούμενος ἐπὶ τινος χειροποιήτου καθήστο γηλόφου, προσῆγε δὲ ἡ στρατιὰ ξὺν τοῖς θηρίοις. Ταῦτα δὲ ἐξ Ἰνδῶν εἶπετο, καὶ ἔφερεν ἐκ σιδήρου πύργους τοξοτῶν πλήρεις.²³

“Thereupon [Shapur II] arrayed the army in the Persian fashion. For they keep up and imitate Persian customs, it seems to me, because they do not wish to be considered Parthians, and so they pretend to be Persians. That is surely why they prefer the Median manner of dress; and when they march to battle they look like them, and take pride in wearing the same armour and dress adorned with gold and purple. By these means they try to evade the truth and to make it appear they have not revolted from Macedon, but are merely resuming the empire that was theirs of old. Thus their king, imitating Xerxes, took position on an artificial elevation; then the army advanced with wild beasts (it is said that they came from India); they brought onward the iron towers full of archers.”

These words of Julian are paradigmatic, in my opinion, not only for understanding the terminological oscillation between Parthians and Persians in the Roman sources, but also because they indicate that the disappearance of the Sasanians from both Julian’s speeches and Ammianus’s *Histories* was a deliberate choice of political anti-propaganda. In substance, as much the Sasanians presented themselves as natural heirs of the Achaemenids, avoiding any mention of their Parthian heritage, so by contrast Julian, a true master of rhetoric, insisted on the fact that the Sasanians were merely Parthians disguised as Persians. This anti-rhetoric technique employed by Julian may explain why the Sasanians disappear from Ammianus’s digression on Persia (which was purposely inserted in his work between Julian’s speeches and the narration of the Persian expedition), where it is claimed that the Sasanians descend from Arsaces. The error of Ammianus cannot be accidental. In the above-mentioned passage, Julian describes precisely the manner in which his enemies besieged towns, and, notwithstanding some allusions to Herodotus in the way Shapur is likened to Xerxes, who admired his fleet from the heights of Abydos²⁴ (although Nisibis compares poorly with Athens), it clearly emerges that Sasanian propaganda was aimed at producing evidence for the ancient Achaemenid origins of the new Iranian empire.

The Parthian era was perceived by Zoroastrian historiography as a very negative period, linked to the deeds of the “accursed Alexander” (*gizistag Aleksandar*), who set on fire the sacred books of the *Avesta*, killed many religious authorities and caused the fragmentation of Persian political power.²⁵ The propaganda invented by the Sasanians themselves, embedded in the *Stories* of Agathias and also reported by later Muslim historians, deliberately shortened the duration of the Parthian kingdom, saying that the reign of the Arsacid (*Aškānid*) rulers lasted only for 266 (or 270) years, which is roughly half of the real period.²⁶

Julian, by contrast, stressed that the Macedonian realm passed from the Seleucids to the Romans, thus the neo-Persian power should be considered subject to Rome; he does not mention, like other classical sources, the territorial claims of the Sasanians, who, it was said, were

restoring the old dimensions of the Achaemenid empire that stretched from India to the Aegean Sea. (Was this a Roman exaggeration, suggested by Herodotus?) Julian enters into the deep motivations of those revisionist ambitions. Thus the “Apostate” was fully aware of the new political form that grew in Persia, and combatted this problem by denying it. I surmise that the philosopher emperor wanted to be called *Parthicus* in order to frustrate the ideological aspirations of his enemies, because the Sasanians deemed the Parthian kingdom as the political descendent of the Seleucids. In the event of Roman success, the Romans planned to hand over the Sasanian kingdom, after the death of Shapur II, to the Persian prince Hormisdas/Ohrmazd (the elder brother of Shapur), who was living in Rome as an exile.²⁷ Julian relied on this Ohrmazd, who served in the Roman cavalry, when he conferred on him the command of the Roman army during the transfer from Constantinople to Antioch.

The modern historians who strongly denied any possibility that the Sasanians could remember, at least to some extent, their Achaemenid past (the famous *historical amnesia*),²⁸ stating that it was just an *interpretatio romana*,²⁹ useful to the publicity of the Roman emperors, grasped, in my opinion, only one important side of this intricate question. Julian, in fact, distorted the meaning of the propaganda of his enemies, insisted on the hetero-ethnic of “Parthians” and connected his campaigns to Trajan’s wars; indeed, in a rare moment when the mask of the historical fiction falls away, he admits that the Sasanians wanted to be called Persians, because they were not Parthians: Πέρσαι δὲ εἶναι προσποιούμενοι, “they pretend/simulate/presume to be Persians”.

It is important that Julian informs us that the Sasanians considered the Achaemenids as their ancestors, in opposition to the Parthian background. What kind of direct or indirect knowledge they had about the Achaemenids is another unresolved problem. In any case, it is doubtful that the idea of the Sasanians as heirs of the Achaemenids could exist *only* in the western historiographical paradigm of the *imitatio Alexandri*,³⁰ because the Sasanian national epic/history, for instance, attested in the *Kārnāmag* of Ardashir, elaborated the assumption that Ardashir was descended *az tōhmag ī Sāsān ud nāf ī Dārāy šāh*, “from the seed of Sāsān and from the lineage of king Darius”.³¹ Similarly, Tabari writes that “he arose in Fārs seeking, as he alleged, to avenge the blood of his paternal cousin Dārā, son of Bahman, son of Isfandiyār, on whom Alexander had made war and had killed two of the latter’s chief commanders”.³²

The contradictory and derogatory genealogy of Ardashir, collected by Agathias (II 27), states that Ardashir was actually the son of a σκυτοτόμος, a “cobbler” or shoemaker, by name Pābag, but Agathias also reports that he stemmed ἐκ σπέρματος Σασάνου, “from the seed of Sāsān”, which is the correct Greek translation of the formula that we find in the inscription of Narseh (NPi § 80), *ō tōhm čē Sāsānagān*, “to the family of Sāsān”.³³ In the Zoroastrian texts, the

Parthian Dark Age was connected with a process of political disintegration, also weakened by the Hellenistic influence, which only Ardashir could reunify and revitalise with his nationalistic Iranian pride. There is a significant passage of the *Bundahishn* (XXXIII 19–20), in which the birth of the Sasanian dynasty is clearly joined to the former periods:

pas andar xwadāyīh ī Dārā(y) ī Dārāyān Aleksandar ī kēsār az Hrōm dwārist ō Ērānšāhr āmad ud Dārā(y)-šāh ōzad ud hamāg dūdag ī xwadāyān ud mow-mardān ud paydāgān ī Ērānšāhr abesihēnīd ud was marag ātaxš afsārd ud dēn ī mazdēsnañ ud zand stad ō Hrōm frēstād ud abestāg sōxt ud Ērānšāhr pad nawad kardag-xwadāy baxt. Pas andar ham hazārag Arda(x)šīr ī Pābagān ō paydāgīh āmad ud ān kardag-xwadāyān ōzad ud xwadāyīh win(n)ārd ud dēn ī mazdēsnañ rawāgēnīd ud ēwēnag ī was wirāst ī pad tōhmag ī ōy raft.³⁴

“Then during the reign of Dārā, the son of Dārā, Alexander the Caesar moved from Rome and came to the Iranian kingdom, he killed king Dārā and destroyed all the families of the rulers, the Magi and the notables of the Iranian kingdom; he extinguished a great number of fires and took away the *Zand* of the Mazdean religion and sent it to Rome; he set on fire the *Avesta* and divided the Iranian kingdom among ninety house-rulers. Then, in the same millennium, came Ardashir, the son of Pābag, he killed those lords and restored the sovereignty, promoted the religion of the Mazdeans, established many customs and went with his own stock.”

Ardashir, restoring the good religion that was dispersed by the accursed Alexander, restored the mythical Iranian tradition and presented himself as the natural continuator of a millenary royal saga. Thus, the Sasanian monarchy found its legitimation among the members of Sāsān’s family, whose historical origin is unfortunately lost in myth. Sasanian inscriptions do not say explicitly that Sāsān was Ardashir’s father or grandfather; this was assumed by later historians. But there is the possibility that the “lord” (*xwadāy*) Sāsān claimed royal blood from some Indo-Parthian dynasty.³⁵ In any case, it is unlikely that all these peculiar aspects of Sasanian kingship could be really understood outside the Iranian context. We cannot exclude *a priori* that all the abundant mentions, both in the Greco-Roman and in the Iranian sources, that refer to the rights of the Persian “ancestors” (πρόγονοι/*maiores*) could have something to do with the Achaemenid past, even if confused. Rahim Shayegan has recently demonstrated that the tradition of evoking one’s forebears in royal inscriptions, always within the selfsame dynasty, is typical of the Iranian conception of kingship. As a matter of fact, the ancestors are mentioned in Old-Persian texts (*apaniyāka-*), in Middle-Persian and Parthian inscriptions (*ahēnagān/hasēnagān*), and also the inscription of Rabatak offers a reconstruction of Kanishka’s genealogy.³⁶ What we can maintain is that all this convergence of sources mentioning the forefathers of the kings was not a pure invention of the western authors, but an integral part of

the mythical elaboration of the Sasanian State. This mythical elaboration was then picked up by the Romans.

In the end, we still lack clear evidence about the identity of these venerable ancestors: were they the Achaemenids, the Fratarakās or mythical kings, like the Kayānids, who never existed in history? We receive different answers according to each source. As we have seen, Ardashir was not presented in the *Bundahishn* as a direct descendant from the Achaemenid family, but rather as the legitimate restorer of kingship over the Iranian lands, and this exactly corresponds to the Roman view.

The ancient debate that flourished on the true origin of the Persian kings indicates that the Romans did in fact realise that a new era had started with Ardashir, once one looks beyond their strongly denigrating propaganda against their Oriental enemies. Unfortunately, it is impossible to find out just one monolithic truth, but I hope to have shown that sometimes terminological confusions may conceal more recondite political motivations.

Notes

- 1 Dąbrowa 1984, p. 160.
- 2 Felix 1985, p. 25–42, collects the ancient sources about Ardashir’s reign; see also Dodgeon, Lieu 1991, p. 9–15; Hackl, Jacobs, Weber 2010, p. 169; Alram, Gyselen 2003, p. 21–31; Frendo 2002, with further bibliography.
- 3 Kettenhofen 1984; *idem* 2002; Wiesehöfer 1986; Gnoli 1996; Huyse 2002; Shayegan 2011, p. 30–38.
- 4 Alföldy 1989, p. 229–237.
- 5 Shayegan 2011, p. 41–45; Muccioli 2013, p. 403–409.
- 6 Wiesehöfer 2006, p. 401–408; von Gall 1980.
- 7 Paratore 1966; Pugliese Carratelli 1971, p. 598–599.
- 8 Feraco 2004, p. 110–111; Drijvers 1999, p. 195; Brok 1975, p. 49–50.
- 9 Bowersock 1978, p. 105–119; Drijvers 2006, p. 46: “In 363 he took part in the disastrous Persian expedition of Julian, of which he presents an elaborate description in Books 23–25 of the *Res Gestae*”. On Julian’s *Perserfeldzug*, see also Brodka 2009, p. 78–88; Blockley 1988; Fornara 1991; Barnes 1998; Smith 1999.
- 10 Bowersock 1978, p. 122–123; Chauvot 1998, p. 174–175.
- 11 According to Ammianus, Gordian’s tomb was at Zaitha (*H.* XXIII 5, 7), while Zosimus says that it was near Dura (*Zos.* III 14, 2). See Fornara 1991, p. 8; Edwell 2008, p. 69.
- 12 *Ornamentis inlustrum gloriarum inserere Parthici cognomentum ardebat* (*H.* XXII 12, 2); Potter 2004, p. 517–518; Drijvers 1999, p. 203.
- 13 *Persis Saporem saansaan appellantis et pirosen, quod rex regibus imperans et bellorum victor interpretatur* (*H.* XIX 2, 11). See Drijvers 2006, p. 53.
- 14 Drijvers 1999, p. 195; *idem* 2006, p. 52–61.
- 15 *Unde ad id tempus reges eiusdem gentis praetumidi appellari se patiuntur Solis fratres et Lunae* (*H.* XXIII 6, 5). Cf. XVII 5, 3: *Rex regum Sapor, particeps siderum, frater Solis et Lunae*. Drijvers 1999, p. 198; *idem* 2006, p. 60; Muccioli 2009, p. 89.
- 16 *Quam ob rem numinis eum vice venerantur et colunt eo usque propagatis honoribus, ut ad nostri memoriam non*

- nisi Arsacides, si sit usquam, in suscipiendo regno cunctis antepontatur (H. XXIII 6, 6).
- 17 Chauvot 1992, p. 116–117.
- 18 CIL VI 1097. Ziegler 1964, p. 142–143.
- 19 Alram, Blet-Lemarquand, Skjærvø 2007, p. 12–13.
- 20 Mazzarino 1971; Edwell 2008, p. 171–173.
- 21 Chauvot 1998, p. 164–169; *idem* 1992, p. 118–119: “A la confusion inorganisée du premier *Eloge* se substitute une confusion délibérée. Tout se passe comme si les Perses sassanides n’existaient pas [...] Aux Sassanides, qui se présentent comme les héritiers des Achéménides, dont ils revendiquent les anciens territoires, Julien oppose implicitement qu’ils ne sont que des Parthes déguisés en Perses”.
- 22 Shayegan 2011, p. 361–368; Gariboldi 2011, p. 42–50.
- 23 Lacombrade 1964, p. 133.
- 24 Hdt. VII 44.
- 25 Daryaei 2007.
- 26 Gnoli 2013, p. 43–47; Gariboldi 2011, p. 78–81; Cameron 1969–70, p. 105 (Agath. II 26, 1).
- 27 Amm. Marc. XVI 10, 16; XXIV 1, 2; Zos. II 27; Zos. III 11, 3; Zon. XIII 5. John of Antioch (F266), tells the curious story of Ohrmazd’s flight from his Persian prison, with the help of his mother and wife who prepared for him iron chains full of pearls (as a symbol of royalty); he fled to Licinius. But according to Zosimus, Ohrmazd found a knife-file inside a fish brought by his wife. There are interesting similarities between the romantic stories of Kawād and Ohrmazd, who were both able to escape from prison with the help of their women. About the role of Hormisdas in Roman strategy, see Shayegan 2011, p. 367–368. (Libanios *Ep.* 1402); Gariboldi 2011, p. 44; Potter 2004, p. 517; Mosig-Walburg 2000, p. 78–82; Blockley 1992, p. 9–12.
- 28 Yarshater 1971; Daryaei 2002.
- 29 Kettenhofen 1984; Straub 1986; Huyse 2002; Shayegan in this volume.
- 30 Huyse 2002, p. 307: “Il est possible, même vraisemblable, que les Sassanides aient revendiqué des territoires jadis en la possession de leurs ancêtres. Il est en revanche hautement improbable qu’ils aient circonscrit le territoire revendiqué d’une façon aussi précise que les revendications formulées par les auteurs gréco-romains le laissent à supposer. Il est de surcroît tout à fait exclu qu’ils aient fait référence à Cyrus ou à d’autres rois achéménides, encore moins au maudit Alexandre le Grand.” Yarshater 1971, p. 519, evidenced that a real *historical amnesia* of the Achaemenid past started in Iran during the Parthian period; the question was debated also by Gnoli 1989, p. 124: “Some sort of memory, however vague, of the Achaemenian past must have existed anyway during the Parthian period and, to some extent, must have been less vague in Fars, the cradle of the ancient dynasty”; Shayegan 2011, p. xiv: “The portrayal of the Sasanians as heirs to the Achaemenids thus existed as an intrinsic part of the Roman *imitatio*, which not only sought to evince the historical continuity of the Greco-Roman world by vindicating Alexander’s legacy, but also to bestow a similar perception of permanence upon the history of the east by depicting the Sasanians as cognizant heirs of the Achaemenids.”
- 31 Daryaei 2002, p. 5.
- 32 Tabarī 814: Bosworth 1999, p. 3.
- 33 Gariboldi 2005; Shayegan 2011, p. 14–17.
- 34 Pakzad 2005, p. 366–367.
- 35 There are coins of a certain Farn-Sāsān who ruled in Sakastān in the late Parthian and early Sasanian period, but he was an enemy and not a vassal of the Sasanian kings. See Nikitin 1994; Alram 2007, p. 234–235; Olbrycht in this volume.
- 36 Shayegan 2008; *idem* 2011, p. 14–29 and *passim*; also in this volume.

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Kirdēr and the Re-organisation of Persian Mazdeism

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The ascent of the Sasanian dynasty had an enormous impact on the future development of Zoroastrianism, particularly in western Iran. This assumption is based on objective evidence, which is unfortunately not always fully considered by historians in all its heavy implications. This evidence consists of ritual and theological Mazdean sources organised according to patterns established and fixed in Persia, during and after the establishment of Sasanian power. This includes the written Avestan tradition, in particular its ritual texts, which preserved not only the two earlier Mazdean liturgies, the long and short versions, but also the later exegetical and priestly commentaries such as the *Nērangestān*, as well as, finally, the Pahlavi *Zand*.¹ On the other hand, and by way of contrast with this rich western tradition, we possess only very superficial data about the contemporary liturgy of eastern Zoroastrianism – I mean that form of Mazdean religion rooted among the communities of Sogdiana, Bactria, Choresmia, Sistan and so on. Thus, apart from a Sogdian fragment of the *Ašm Vohū* and few other debated references,² we do not have direct access to Avestan sources and liturgies presented according to a Late Antique eastern *recensio*, independent of that developed within the framework of the western (i.e. Persian) schools of Mazdean priests. We are therefore compelled to refer to archaeological data in the form of pictorial cycles. These have been thoroughly investigated by Russian and European scholars, among whom I must mention in particular Fr. Grenet (and his collaborators), who has often focused on Zoroastrian religious content in a number of Sogdian paintings in his research.³ Our current knowledge of ancient Mazdeism is in fact mostly based on a number of ritual texts whose *Vorlage* was established in western Iran under the authority of the Sasanian kings and by their priestly staff. Furthermore, our views are based on evidence from regions where Sasanian control was direct, and where Persian influence was very important. I want to be precise about this. As we know, the Sasanians were extremely

active also in eastern Iran, but the impact of their presence there was balanced and countered by prominent and rich local traditions, which unfortunately did not achieve any consistent attempt to produce a written version of the Avestan liturgy. Consequently, we do not now possess any Avestan manuscript or ritual source that was fixed according to a written system or that simply followed a tradition based on a direct continuity, either from the ancestral Avestan communities in eastern Iran or else from the communities that later lived in more or less the same geographical areas. The legacy of the earliest Zoroastrian tradition was fixed only after its liturgy had been transmitted (probably in Achaemenid times) from eastern to western Iran, most likely in Persia, and there it was finally transcribed during the Sasanian period.⁴ This does not mean we can state that other versions belonging to an earlier and genuine Avestan heritage were unknown or never fixed, but evidence of their existence remains an historical and philological *desideratum*, a dream, not a reality. It is a paradox, but the most important cultural heritage of the pre-Islamic eastern Iranian linguistic and spiritual tradition, that represented by Avestan literature, is a material (but at the same time also an intellectual) production that we have today thanks to the active role of religious elites formed and educated in western Iran, more specifically in the framework of Late Antiquity and early mediaeval Persia.

The additional fact that the Avestan alphabet was derived from the Pahlavi model shows the absolute importance of the western Iranian cultural context. This is further supported by certain influences recognisable in the characters and conventions adopted also in the Pahlavi Psalter, which follow patterns such as the distinction between short (“closed”) and long (“open”) vowels, as attested in Greek and Syriac scripts (and it is from the Greek alphabet that at least three Avestan signs derive more or less directly).⁵

For these reasons, the role of the Sasanians was surely essential in many respects. In the present contribution, I would

like to focus on some facts relating to the first century of Persian domination, in close connection with the documentation left by the priest Kirdēr about the re-organisation of “Persian” Zoroastrianism.⁶ This mission of Kirdēr proved to be not only very efficient but also seminal for its future development, notwithstanding the eventual collapse of the Sasanian empire and the change of religion after the Muslim conquest. In fact, it is my personal belief that without the Sasanians we would probably lack access (albeit limited and unilateral) to Avestan sources themselves. Instead our knowledge of Zoroastrianism would be based mostly on Western (Greek and Latin), Arabic and Syriac sources, or fragmentary archaeological materials of a local nature, such as bullae, seals, etc., along with other “concrete” scattered remains. We should bear in mind that we do not have from Sasanian times a single important liturgical (and textual) document concerning a Mazdean ritual (with the exception of the two inscriptions commissioned by Kirdēr concerning his “vision”).⁷ Therefore without the evidence from (later) Avestan and Pahlavi manuscripts (none of which has come from an archaeological context but rather from the mediaeval collections of Mazdean temples), our picture of Zoroastrianism would have been severely mutilated, if not totally ruined.

As part of this paper, I want to reflect on the career of Kirdēr.⁸ He was already mentioned among the dignitaries of Šābuhr (Shapur) in ŠKZ § 49, an inscription probably composed between 260 and 262 AD, as noted by Huyse.⁹ He then obtained two further promotions, as we can deduce from the titles¹⁰ which he attributed to himself under four different kings.¹¹ As Skjærvø¹² has summarised, his official titles were as follows:

§4: Under Šābuhr (Shapur) (r. 239/40?-72?): *Kirdēr ī ēhrbed* (M-P. 34 <’yhrpt>, Parth. 28 <’hrpty>, Gr. 66 ΜΑΓΟΥ; then: *Kirdēr ī mowbed ud ēhrbed*;

§6: under Ohrmazd I (r. 272?-73): *Kirdēr ī Ohrmazd mowbed Ohrmazd bay pad nām* “Kirdēr the mowbed of Ohrmazd, after the name of Ohrmazd the god”;

§8: under Wahrām I (r. 273–76): *Kirdēr ī Ohrmazd mowbed*;

§10: under Wahrām II (r. 276–93): *Kirdēr ī bōxt-ruwān-Warahrān ī Ohrmazd mowbed*.

As is well known, the last appearance of this priest is in the Paikuli inscription (293 AD), where he is described as *Kirdēr Ohrmazd may[bed]* (Parth. line 14 <mgw[pt]>).¹³

If the idea of an ascent, of an official progress, in function, authority and power, is clear in the wording of Kirdēr’s titles, I must nevertheless underline the fact that his decision to publish four personal inscriptions showed the new and prominent social role he dared to assume. Although written texts were probably accessible to a limited number of people, I cannot assume that the emission of these inscriptions had no public importance. Nor can I accept that illiterates did

not know the contents of these documents (if we presume, although I am not completely sure of this, that powerful people had no access to written texts either directly or through personal scribes in their service). This act, because of its public effect, assumed an intrinsic political force. With it, Kirdēr made it clear that his religious authority, although placed at the service of the king and his dynasty, carried its own role and prestige. Perhaps it would be too far-fetched to say that Kirdēr asserted the autonomy of religious power as opposed to that of the royal family. It is, however, certain that he (deliberately?) did not exactly follow royal protocol in the way he set forth the titles of the various kings, but used instead more prosaic formulations. Furthermore, we must not forget that at the beginning of his inscriptions he expressed his wish to be, in this specific order, “well disposed” firstly towards the gods, then towards Ardaxšīr (Ardashir) and Šābuhr (Shapur). The gods take first place, and his obligations lie firstly towards them, and only secondly towards the crown. Nothing strange, apparently; but it is one thing for a priest to think in this way, another to write down his thought.

Very many scholars have underlined the intolerant character of Kirdēr, in particular with reference to the persecution of religious minorities. Here I think that we should be more prudent in proposing a definitive reconstruction of the historical data in the light of the inevitable religious propaganda promoted by this priest *pro domo sua*. We can entertain some doubt, for instance, as to whether the new Sasanian rulers had any interest in promoting a systematic persecution of all the religious communities living inside the borders of the conquered territories, especially when the new *Šāhān Šāh* assumed the title of king not only of the *Ērān*, but also of the *Anērān*. It is possible that Kirdēr referred merely to his own bold attempts and actions, through which he aimed at imposing a limit on the influence and diffusion of other religious communities. It is also possible that his personal desire to repress, persecute and expel them remained to a certain extent in all probability in his mind. It is possible that not everything lay within his power, at least as he would have desired. It is true that the Manicheans were persecuted, but this happened only at a particular period and not systematically throughout Kirdēr’s long career. Some scholars have, in fact, seen a change in the foreign policy of the Sasanians away from an optimistic universalism towards a more prudent nationalism,¹⁴ although the details are not sufficiently documented. I would prefer not to speak of “liberalism” in the case of Šābuhr (Shapur) I,¹⁵ just as I would prefer not to attribute an overwhelmingly aggressive policy to Kirdēr himself. The truth should probably stay in the balance between political and military interests in asserting control over the newly conquered territories and the religious zealotry of some priests who desired to enlarge their own authority and influence. It is not improbable that Kirdēr too had to wait before it was

possible to enforce his “religious” power. This period of waiting was probably necessary, as he needed to increase his religious authority. And of course, the legitimacy of any power is based on facts – or sometimes on fiction. We may thus suspect that the inscriptions offer a sort of self-hagiographic representation of his religious life.

Many researchers have shown that the technical terminology used by Kirdēr has correspondences or linguistic and theological similarities in the Avestan and Pahlavi texts.¹⁶ Textual references to specific sources have been suggested with a high degree of probability, so that we can trust that Kirdēr knew his job very well, and that he saw himself as following an historical tradition from which the pillars of the attested Mazdean literature derive. We must also consider the evidence that certain patterns used by Kirdēr apparently correspond to earlier Iranian models;¹⁷ it is possible that these striking correspondences reflect a common Iranian heritage and lore, but they could also be the final result of a long oral priestly tradition, already present in ancient Persia. What we see here is his strong anti-Ahremenian enthusiasm and determination, a characteristic fully understandable in an authoritative person, whose main intention was the establishment of a new moral standard and a sort of orthodoxy. But the direction taken by Kirdēr should be seen within the context of the Sasanian conquest, and not independently from it.

In fact, on seizing power the new royal dynasty began to elaborate a fresh ideology, in which the religious element was essential, so that a new line of propaganda was adopted. As I have shown in another contribution,¹⁸ we must imagine that a sort of “*conseil du roi*” was working on the choice of the titles and on the political messages to be sent out by the highest authority of the empire. Nothing was merely the fruit of improvisation or happened simply by chance. The kings were declared to be followers of Ohrmazd (*māzdēšn*), to possess the same image/brightness of their gods, to represent the most ancestral values of the *Ērān*, although they were not so blind as to pretend a conversion to Zoroastrianism of all the conquered people. They tried to distinguish themselves sharply from the past dynasty, thus creating a dark image for the Parthians.

The same arguments should be considered if we look at the iconography of Sasanian coins, where various items of religious *regalia* were chosen and engraved, to say nothing of the representation of the sacred fires on the reverse. It is difficult to imagine that these symbols were adopted without any discussion between the most senior members of the royal family, the most important officers, and the religious élite of the kingdom. But this was propaganda, and normal, as happens today. We can, however, suppose that the priests who supported and flanked the Sasanian innermost royal circle offered many suggestions. It would be inconceivable that the royal family had elaborated and developed a full plan of political theology concerning the monarchy without

consulting its own clergy. Kirdēr and other priests were part of an élite, which framed and shared a common project, and they in turn supported the plans of the royal clan by creating a more elaborated hierarchy, in which it was possible to follow an ascending sacerdotal career. This also meant that it was necessary to coordinate the different temples, which in part already existed, but which probably did not answer to a unified authority and leadership. On the one hand, this kind of development was a religious issue but, on the other hand, it was also a matter of political interest, because the most important temples had huge properties and inevitably they played not only a spiritual but also a very significant economic and social function. The progress towards religious standardisation of the empire was paralleled by that of its military and administrative control. This also explains why the priestly class assumed an ever more pervasive role in the administration of justice. It is difficult to believe that this role was obtained by the priests without the support of those who wielded political power.

We cannot avoid some consideration of Kirdēr’s emphasis (§16) on his zealous activity against the *ahlomōys*, or “heretics”, an action that assumed not only religious but also political implications. Skjærvø¹⁹ has rightly recalled the Avestan background of this term (Y. 9, 18, etc.). It refers not only to evil-doers, but also to special enemies of the priests.

We also find in Kirdēr’s inscriptions references to the moral pillars of Zoroastrianism with regard to marriage (with open support for the *xwēdōdah*, or “next-of-kin marriage”) and sexual practice, so that it is impossible to deny that he was in absolute agreement with what we know about common Mazdeism according to its written ritual and exegetical sources.

I want also to draw your attention to the fact that Kirdēr in the systematic description of his career underlines his active role in controlling the territory covered by the priestly community (*mowestān* or *mogestān*),²⁰ both at court and throughout the empire. He insists on the fact that divine services and rituals were increased and that many new fires of Wahrām were founded. Such a process must be seen in connection with the parallel statements presented by Šābuhr (Shapur) I in his *Res Gestae*, §§ 32–35,²¹ when he emphasises the fires restored or founded by him and the rituals he put in order. The two descriptions refer to a common plan, probably decided in the same rooms and by the same leadership. The fact that Kirdēr openly states that the conditions of the priests were improved and that many agreements or contracts were signed for their own advantage confirms the economic and political background to his actions.

It is also interesting to note that the high priest writes that he was established already under Šābuhr (Shapur) I as “independent and sovereign” (§ 2; *k’mk’ly W p’thš’y [kāmgār ud pādixšā]*) over the *mogestān* (§ 2). This same statement was confirmed under the later kings. This kind of

autonomy must carry a certain meaning and cannot be just an empty pretension. We can probably see here the basis of an alliance, but also the origin of an impending dichotomy in the political history of the Sasanian kingdom.

Just before concluding this brief reflection on the first steps of the interaction between politics and religion at the beginning of the Sasanian empire, I would like to share with you a last series of remarks on the function of the so-called “vision” expressed in two inscriptions by Kirdēr. Its contents are a matter of debate and polemics. Recently I have also entered the discussion, simply making a few critical remarks.²²

1. The vision cannot be the description of something that happened in a trance. This kind of ritual is not attested in the Mazdean liturgical tradition. In addition, when scholars assume that the trance was collective and that it was shared by a group of people or, worse, of children, I simply ask how this is possible. I understand that a person can fall into a trance and then start to speak, but how can two or more people fall into a trance and say the same thing at the same time? As for children, it is known that they were not admitted to official rituals in the whole Indo-Iranian tradition.
2. The main idea strongly rooted in the speculative conception of the Avestan ritual was that of opening an esoteric path, where Ohrmazd and the priests could meet. In other words the *Yasna* and other rituals were an instrument to obtain a mental vision, an anticipation in life of the afterlife, a means through which the priests became *saošiiaṇts*, as recently underlined by Kellens.²³ We also know that one of the titles used by Kirdēr is *Ohrmazd mowbed*. As Skjærvø has written:²⁴ “It is known also in Pahlavi; in *Dēnkard* 4.22 (ed. Dresden, p. [322]; ed. Madan, p. 413) we are told that it was applied to persons who had been revealed to have the ability to see in(to) the other world (*mēnōy-wēnišnīh*; Zaehner 1955: 8; Gignoux, 1968: p. 413, n. 19).”

This was exactly what Kirdēr did. In other words, I suggest that Kirdēr organised a ceremony in which he framed a sort of ritual drama, a representation of the journey to paradise of his own double or, literally, “Kirdēr’s likeness” (*hangerb*), and his meeting with the female double of his future *dēn*, there represented as a “woman” (*zan* [NYŠE]),²⁵ probably a reflex of the Av. *carāiti-* (*H.N.* 2, 10; *čarāydyg* in the Pahlavi translation).²⁶ But I have already offered in detail my arguments on this subject and there is not time to repeat them here.²⁷

What I did not clarify earlier is that the high priest Kirdēr installed a special ritual. Its target was not to perform his anticipated death, but to show himself (in his quality of person in whose favour the ritual was organized, i.e. like

a Vedic *yājamāna-*) his final destiny. At the time of the ritual, Kirdēr was not dead, and therefore it is his double, his *hangerb*, who meets the *dēn*, which is presented simply as a superb woman. This description of the *dēn* (although differently denominated) is in agreement with that attested in the Avestan source. In addition, the simple reference to a woman, who helps the *ruwān* (soul) to cross the Činwad bridge, not expressly called *dēn* but rather *kanīg-kirb* (literally “having the body of a woman”), is mentioned in a later Pahlavi book, the *Anthology of Zādspram*. This source dedicates all chapter 31 to the *mard-kirb* (“the form of man”) and the *kanīg-kirb* (“the form of woman”).²⁸ This particular passage presents clear eschatological implications. The functions of the *kanīg-kirb* are patently those of the *dēn*, exactly as in the inscriptions of Kirdēr. The role of the *mard-kirb*, however, remains mostly unclear, although indisputably eschatological. (In 31, 1, the *ruwān* can reach the garden of paradise with his help and that of the “form of woman”, who are presented as the father and the mother of the soul itself.) My impression is that Zādspram still had a distant memory of a tradition in which both these doubles played a specific role, but he was not conversant with that esoteric tradition. In fact, it is evident that the *mard-kirb* corresponds to Kirdēr’s *hangerb* (where *gerb* is equivalent to *-kirb*, both being a derivation from Av. *kāhrpa-* “body”), while the *kanīg-kirb* corresponds to the “superb” *zan*, who meets him. Furthermore, Kirdēr’s likeness, his *hangerb*, represented the living person, which, as in Zādspram, is different from the *ruwān*. In fact, in the afterlife, according to the Mazdean doctrine, it is only the masculine soul, the *ruwān* (Av. *uruuan-*), which meets the *dēn* (Av. *daēnā-*). Thus, the masculine soul finally meets the feminine one. But here, according to the inscriptions of Kirdēr, nobody was dead. Kirdēr is alive and wants to know his destiny. Consequently we must deduce that in this context a special carefully controlled terminology was adopted; it is only the double of the individual who wants to see his final destiny that is employed (and his name is therefore repeated with *hangerb*), and not his masculine soul, which can be separated from the living person and his/her body only after a true physical death. The terminology attested is, then, not that of children, but of well-trained priests, who know precisely what they are doing. In the later tradition preserved by Zādspram only fragments of a more complex doctrine survive, but its survival is a remarkable witness to an ancient doctrine, no longer practised or properly understood.

I have only one thing left to say. The presence of this apparently strange reference to a very esoteric ritual was also a political act. The high priest showed that he was worthy of his dignity, that he had an extraordinary ritual competence for a ceremony in which his final ascent was enacted. He was a witness of the complete truthfulness of his religion and of his own eschatological power. All those who were able to read or hear the contents of this text of Kirdēr probably

formed different impressions. The uninitiated admired his courage and the superb description of a terrifying and dramatic journey. They should repent of their sins and were perhaps inspired to follow the rules of the religion in the final hope of approaching the paradise of Ohrmazd less fearfully. The few who were fully initiated knew that Kirdēr had been the protagonist in a ritual in which the destiny of his double was celebrated and its entrance to the realm of the afterlife in company of the female double was revealed. Such people probably kept the secret and, if properly qualified, passed through the same ritual themselves at the appropriate time.

But for us, the most important aspect of Kirdēr's "vision" is that it provides us with an account of a sacred ceremony in scriptural form. Although we may have different views about this source, we can all share the objective observation that it contains something which had not only a political force, but also a religious dimension.

We can all furthermore agree that by committing it to textual form, Kirdēr provided us with a document that can open seminal perspectives for further investigations. And this in spite of the fact that the subject of that "vision" was deeply esoteric. But any true power is also full of secrets or else it would appear naked. A naked power cannot last very long, and when its final moment comes, it will not leave, at least, an enduring legacy.

Notes

- 1 On the present status of Avestan studies, see the volume edited by A. Cantera (*The transmission of the Avesta*, Iranica 21, Wiesbaden 2012), containing a number of very pertinent articles on this subject by the best specialists in the field.
- 2 See Gershevitch *apud* Sims-Williams 1976, p. 74–82; *cf.* also Tremblay 2001, *passim*.
- 3 See de la Vaissière & Riboud 2003, p. 127–135.
- 4 It is commonly assumed, although the subject is still open to discussion, that, as Hoffmann (1989, p. 53 = 1992, p. 870) stated: "YAv. *ij* and *uy* may have developed in West Iran under the influence of Old Persian, where every postconsonantal *i* and *u* became *iy* and *uv* respectively"; *cf.* Kellens (1989, p. 35), who doubts the Arachosian alteration against Hoffmann 1979 (= 1992, p. 736–740).
- 5 See Hoffmann 1971 (reprinted in 1975); 1989; Panaino 1997a.
- 6 This should not be interpreted as confirmation that Kirdēr played a unique role in the foundation of Sasanian Zoroastrianism, as, for instance, it was assumed by Sprengling (1940, p. 215). Sprengling thought that Ardashīr (Ardashir) "had little time and opportunity" for such things. On the contrary, I believe that already in the earliest phases of their ascent to power the Sasanians paid great attention to propaganda and to the construction of an ideological and religious programme, which was, obviously, developed and improved under Šābuhr (Shapur).
- 7 On this subject see the discussion in Panaino 2011, with a large bibliography. *Cf.* also Skjærvø 2011, p. 611–613, *passim*.
- 8 *Cf.* U. Weber 2009; 2010.
- 9 Huyse 1999, I, p. 10–14.

- 10 They appear "both in the description of his career in the first part of the longer inscriptions and in the summary at the end of the inscriptions (§38), including KNRb" (after Skjærvø 2011, p. 610).
- 11 See Henning 1954, p. 40–42; MacKenzie 1989, p. 62.
- 12 Skjærvø 2011, p. 610–611.
- 13 Ed. Humbach – Skjærvø 1983, pt. 3.1, p. 41–43); *cf.* the Manichean Parthian form <qyrd[y]r mgbyd> (M6031 I Bi 5; Henning, 1942, p. 948–949; Sundermann 1981, p. 71).
- 14 See in particular Gnoli 1984.
- 15 *Cf.* Skjærvø 2011, p. 620.
- 16 See Skjærvø 2011, p. 612, p. 617.
- 17 See Gnoli 1979, p. 425–432.
- 18 Panaino 2009.
- 19 2011, p. 617.
- 20 See MacKenzie 1998, p. 61–62. *Cf.* Back 1979, p. 230; Gignoux 1972, p. 28; 1991, p. 66, n. 123.
- 21 Huyse 1999 I, p. 45–48; II, p. 102–110. *Cf.* Mariq 1965, p. 56–59.
- 22 Panaino 2011; Panaino in press.
- 23 See the *Résumé* of J. Kellens' lecture of 20 January 2012, now accessible on the web site of the Collège de France.
- 24 2011, p. 613.
- 25 See, e.g., chapters 30 and 31 of the inscription of Naqš-e Rostam, etc.; MacKenzie 1989, p. 50, 56. *Cf.* also Kellens 1975, p. 462–465. For the "beauty" of the *dēn*, see Gnoli 1993, p. 81–82.
- 26 *Cf.* Skjærvø 1983, p. 281; Kellens 1975, p. 462–465; 1995a; 1995b; Piras 2000, p. 53, 60, 66, 79, 93; Gnoli 1994, p. 295–297. *Cf.* again Kellens 1995a; Panaino 1997b. *Cf.* Bartholomae 1904, p. 581, n. 1. With regard to *H.N.* 2, 24 and additional Pahlavi sources see Lecoq 1972, p. 130.
- 27 Panaino 2011; Panaino in press.
- 28 Gignoux – Tafazzoli 1993, p. 112–113.

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LINGUISTIC

The Parthian Language in Early Sasanian Times

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Of semi-nomadic stock from central Asia, the Arsacid dynasty conquered north-eastern Iran and soon assimilated the native population whose language, Parthian, was adopted by the conquerors. This language was a local variety of Middle Iranian.¹ The Parthian victory during the period 148–139/8 BC over the Hellenistic dynasty of the Seleucids, who controlled western Iran and Mesopotamia, brought the Parthian dynasty into contact with Greek, a language of culture and power. Little by little, Parthian would supplant Greek. In the first century of our era, it gradually replaced Greek on coins, an outstanding tool for official propaganda.

When the Sasanian dynasty ousted the Parthian Arsacids in 224 AD, the official status of its own language, Pārsīg, usually called Pahlavi or Middle Persian (a variety of southern Middle Iranian), had already been well established. In fact, Pārsīg was the language used for inscriptions on the coins issued by Ardashir I before he became the King of Kings of Iranians and, of course, was still used for this purpose from the very start of his reign as King of Kings. It is highly probable that the Sasanian imperial administration also used Pārsīg from the start of the dynasty, although tangible proof of this is lacking.

The Parthian language, however, remained a major means of communication for Sasanian royalty. Otherwise, Shapur I (241/2–271/2 AD) would not have bothered placing his great inscription on the Ka'ba of Zoroaster in Parthian, as well as Middle Persian and Greek. In the late part of the third century, Parthian was still being used for royal inscriptions, for instance on the monument erected by Narseh (293–302 AD) in Paikuli. Thereafter, the custom of engraving inscriptions on royal monuments was lost; or at least none has yet been discovered. It is, therefore, impossible to specify when Parthian was no longer of interest to the Sasanian dynasty and vanished as a “royal” language. According to Livshits, the Parthian script was used till the fifth century AD, in particular for inscriptions

on earthenware vessels found in southern Turkmenistan and in caves in Iranian Khorasan.²

However, we are not always sure that an inscription in Parthian actually dates from the Sasanian era in the absence of any specific evidence of this. This is the case of the Khorasan graffito *gry'rthštr/nhwdr W hštrp*, which might be interpreted either as “Gar-Ardashir [a person's name], *naxwār* and *šahrab*” or as “*naxwār* and *šahrab* of Gar-Ardashir [a place-name]” (Figure 8.1). The word Gar-Ardashir is evidence that this inscription might date from the Sasanian era,³ since Gar-Ardashir might be a city (and province) founded by Ardashir I (224–240 AD).

When a Parthian inscription is associated with an explicitly Sasanian image, however, it necessarily dates from the Sasanian era. To make this point, I shall comment upon a silver plate and a few seals.

The silver plate, usually known as the “plate from Krasnaya Polyana”, was found in 1947, and has been the subject of several publications.⁴ The plate's imagery consists of a horseman who has lassoed a bear, a not very frequent motif (Figure 8.2a). The first publication on this plate recognised the inscription as Parthian (Figure 8.2b); but in 1961, Lukonin, thinking he saw there the name Wahrām, proposed for the first time an interpretation⁵ attributing the plate to Wahrām II. Harmatta proposed a completely different interpretation in 1973. Harper and Meyers, in their piece on the plate in 1981, followed up on Lukonin's interpretation.⁶ Harmatta's interpretation proposed not a proper name but a sort of formula: “(To be) healthy (is) the supreme (thing) ...”, which is quite unusual on this sort of object.⁷ For his part, Livshits saw in the inscription the name and patronymic of the plate's presumed owner, “Drust, son of Xwan ...”, a reading much more in line with the usual inscriptions on silver plates.⁸

This variety of interpretations has no bearing on dating the plate however, the elementary composition in silver



Figure 8.1: After Henning 1953, pl. V.

being typical of the initial phase of the Sasanian era.⁹ Furthermore, the style presents traits similar to other plates from the third century. Several aspects of the imagery are Parthian: the position of the rider who has turned backwards to lasso the bear, a position known, when the horseman is shooting an arrow, as the “Parthian shot”. Furthermore, his left profile is portrayed, whereas the right profile is more common during the Sasanian era.

When Harper published her study of the plate, she likened the rider’s headdress (*kulāf*) (Figure 8.3a) to that

of a dignitary on a clay sealing found in Qasr-i Abu Nasr (Figure 8.3b).¹⁰ We have since learned that the decoration around the headdress signals the person’s office or rank. The palmette depicted on the *kulāf* of the horseman on the Krasnaya Polyana plate is the same as the one associated with *dar-(h)andarzbed*, “court counsellor”, (Figure 8.3c) and *mogūn-handarzbed*, “counsellor of magi” (Figure 8.3b); but the number of palmettes is different. On the seals, the *kulāf* of the “court counsellor” has eight palmettes,¹¹ and that of the “counsellor of magi” has six – as compared with three



Figure 8.2a: Silver-gilt plate from Krasnaya Polyana. After Harper/Meyers 1981, pl. 9.

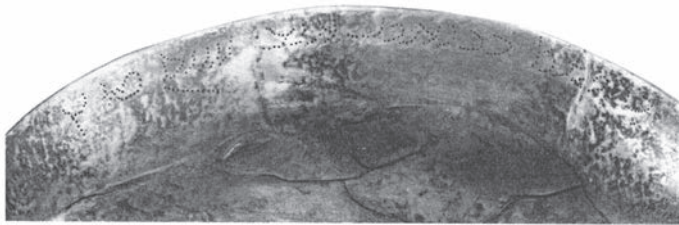


Figure 8.2b: Inscription on the plate from Krasnaya Polyana. After Lukonin 1961, pl. XII.



Figure 8.3a: Head of the male figure on the plate from Krasnaya Polyana. Drawing by H. Renel. Scale 1:1.



Figure 8.3b: Drawing of a seal impression on a clay bulla found in Qasr-i Abu Nasr. After Frye 1973: D.103. Scale 2:1(?).

on the horseman's headdress depicted on the plate. We can deduce that he, too, was a "counsellor", but we cannot determine to whom, even though the hypothesis that he might have been the king's counsellor would be compatible with such a precious object.

Although other silver vessels bear inscriptions in Parthian, few present imagery of a Sasanian type.¹² Several collections contain Sasanian seals with Parthian inscriptions.¹³ In my opinion, some of these seals do not have enough clearly Sasanian traits to assign them definitively to this period.¹⁴

I shall comment on only four seals, each with a man's bust of a type also attested on seals with inscriptions in Pahlavi, clear evidence that they can be identified as Sasanian. The best known of the four belonged to someone named



Figure 8.3c: Seal impression (44.5 × 50.5 mm) on a clay bulla. Drawing by H. Renel. After Gyselen 2008, Seal 13. Scale 1:1.



Figure 8.4a: Seal of Agn-wist. State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg (19 × 27 mm). Drawing by H. Renel. After Gyselen 2008, Seal 1. Scale 2:1.



Figure 8.4b: Seal impression of the šahrab of Balkh (± 21 × 31 mm). Drawing by H. David after the illustrations in Nikitin 1994. Scale 2:1.



Figure 8.4c: Seal of Rōz-būd (24 × 32.5 mm), British Museum (inv. nr. 135071). Drawing by H. Renel. After Gyselen 2008, Seal 13. Scale 2:1.



Figure 8.5a: Seal of Tiris (19 × 24 mm), British Museum (inv. nr. 120202). Bivar 1969, AA1. Drawing by H. David. Scale 2:1.



Figure 8.5b: Seal of Manučīhr (15 × 20 mm), British Museum (inv. nr. 119737). Bivar 1969, AA2. Drawing by H. David. Scale 2:1.



Figure 8.5c: Glass paste found in Vietnam. After Manguin 2004, p. 299, fig. 12.14. Unknown dimensions.



Figure 8.6a: Seal with Parthian inscription (? × 11 × 13.5 mm), Bibliothèque nationale de France (inv. nr. Coll. Chandon de Briailles, 23.455bis (1953)). After Gyselen 1993, 20.C.1. Scale 2:1.



Figure 8.6b: Seal with Pahlavi inscription (15.5 × 17.5 mm), Musée du Louvre (inv. nr. AOD 246 (ex-coll. Dieulafoy)). After Gyselen 1993, 20.C.10. Scale 2:1.



Figure 8.7a: Seal with Parthian inscription (21 × 23.7 mm), Bibliothèque nationale de France (inv. nr. D3398 (1854)). After Gyselen 1993, 20.D.1. Scale 2:1.



Figure 8.7b: Seal with Pahlavi inscription (12.5 × 17 mm), Bibliothèque nationale de France (I 6 (ancien fonds?)). After Gyselen 1993, 20.D.2. Scale 2:1.

Agn-wist; it is in the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg (Figure 8.4a). The last study of its Parthian inscription was by Livshits and Xurshudjan.¹⁵ The seal's owner was a *mardbed*, the “head of controllers, of warehousemen”, “head of accountancy” or “chief accountant”. The title *mardbed* is not attested elsewhere. This person's high status is evident in the imagery: the wearing of a *kulāf* (of a Parthian sort) enhanced by a device was reserved for top officials in the Sasanian empire, most of whom came from the traditional nobility. The type and style of the bust are similar to what appears on several other seals, for instance the bilingual Pahlavi-Bactrian seal of Mihrmeh *šahrab* of Balkh (Figure 8.4b)¹⁶ or the seal of Rōz-būd with, in Pahlavi, the title *mēhārān-sālār* (Figure 8.4c).¹⁷

An inscription in Parthian with the name Tiris (Figure 8.5a) is engraved on the only known personal seal of an *āmārgar*, “bookkeeper, accountant”.¹⁸ On the Ka'ba of Zoroaster (ŠKZ), no courtier of Ardashir I or Shapur I was mentioned as holding this office. This is obviously not proof that this office was not held by high-ranking persons. Like the *mardbed*, the *āmārgar* is wearing a beaded *kulāf* of a Parthian type but without any device. Headdresses of this sort are attested elsewhere. A glass seal without any inscription, found in Vietnam, presents a quite similar image (Figure 8.5c),¹⁹ as does a seal bearing in Pahlavi the name and title Manučīhr, Ardašīr-šnōm (Figure 8.5b).²⁰ The honorary title with *šnōm* “satisfaction” and Ardashir's name (probably Ardashir I) are evidence of this person's high status. In fact, two members of the court of Shapur I had comparable honorary names: Ardašīr, Ardašīr-šnōm and Wohnām, Šābuhr-šnōm.²¹ Thanks to Sebeos's history, we know that this kind of honorary title continued to exist, since Khusro II (590–628 AD) honoured Sembāt Bagratuni, his Armenian general, with the title Khusrō-šnōm.²² Ohrmazd-šnōm was the honorary name of a certain Khusrō, who was probably the lucky owner of a silver plate.²³ All these instances of a title made up of the king's name followed by *šnōm* are evidence that someone who received such an honorary title belonged to the empire's elite.

The smaller third seal bears a bust of a man with long curls (Figure 8.6a), similar to the one on a personal seal with the owner's name and patronymic in Pahlavi, “Ādur, (son of) Anāhīdag” (Figure 8.6b).²⁴ Father de Menasce (1962) proposed reading the Parthian inscription as *m'ny SPRA*, “the scribe Māni”, whereas Gignoux read it as *[M]H mg 'spk(n)y*, “son of Mag-Aspak”²⁵ and Livshits as *s(?)mr 'spk(n)y*, “son of Aspak”.²⁶ This inscription has a few reversed or erroneous letters – partly engraved in a positive instead of the customary negative manner; and its interpretation is probably not definitive.

Likewise, the inscription on the fourth seal is puzzling since part of it is in Parthian and the rest in Bactrian or Sogdian (Figure 8.7a).²⁷ But there are several parallels with the imagery on Sasanian seals, for instance the seal

in the collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (henceforth BnF) with the name Gūrgēn engraved on it (Figure 8.7b).²⁸ This fourth seal bears the following inscriptions: from four o'clock to one o'clock the Parthian letters *ssnwn*, then from one o'clock to eleven o'clock the Sogdian letters, and then from eleven to eight o'clock, the Parthian letters *dtBRY*. The Parthian inscription reads “Sāsān, son of Vindād”.²⁹ Livshits has suggested that this seal is a “palimpsest”; in other words, it was reused.³⁰ Since the Parthian inscription is interrupted by the Sogdian, the latter probably dates farther back than the former. However, it is hard to imagine how this image in a fully Sasanian style came to be associated with an inscription in Sogdian.

Apart from the motif, these four seals have several other points in common. All are convex bezels (or slightly cabochon) in materials used exclusively for flat or convex bezels but never for other shapes: amethyst for the Agn-wist seal, onyx for the seals of Tiris and the son of Mag-Aspak, almandine garnet for the Sāsān seal. Furthermore, each of the four bears its owner's name.

Let us now turn to the use of Parthian on Sasanian magic seals. In 1967, Bivar published a study of a magic seal in the shape of a thick bezel with, on one side, a motif in a Sasanian style and an inscription in Parthian (Figure 8.8a) and, on the other side, a she-wolf suckling two cubs with, in Pahlavi, a woman's name and the oft-attested formula *rāst*: “Duxt-Ādur, true” (Figure 8.8b).³¹ The motif of a suckling she-wolf exists on many other magic seals, but never with two cubs — instead with a small human being and a small wolf or with two small human beings. For this reason, these scenes, though very similar at first sight, have, in fact, different meanings.³²

According to Bivar, the side with the she-wolf might have been engraved after the side with the inscription in Parthian, the seal having been reworked to receive the second motif. Now however we also know of several other magic seals with a similar shape — a large, thick bezel with two slightly convex sides.³³ This increases the plausibility of the hypothesis that the seal was initially designed as a bezel with two sides.

The side with the Parthian inscription bears the image of a “royal” person who has caught a hybrid ithyphallic hermaphrodite with long ears (Figure 8.8a). A nearly identical image and inscription figure on a large convex seal in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris (Figure 8.9). Livshits proposed to Gignoux that the Parthian inscription on the latter seal was: *ptgwb*³⁴ *ZNH* (*ssn*) with, on a second line, *mgw* i.e. *paygōy/paygōw ēn sāsān mog*, which was interpreted as “This charm (belongs to) Sasan, the Magian”.³⁵ The name of Sasan [*sic*] in Pahlavi has been deciphered on several magic seals, in particular on one that mentions Sasan opposing a demon with the same name, Sasan-Marg *dēw* (literally: the demon Sasan's death).³⁶



Figure 8.8: Magical seal (38 × 36 × 13 mm), Collection R. Falkiner. After Gyselen 1995, p. 38, fig. 37a-b. Scale 2:1.



Figure 8.9: Magical seal (15.7 × 34.4 × 34.4 mm), Bibliothèque nationale de France (inv. nr.1975.251.12). After Gyselen 1995, fig. 36. Scale 2:1.

Why does this Parthian seal qualify this guardian divinity (?) as a “magus”?

Seals with inscriptions in Pahlavi exist that have an imagery similar to the four seals with a man’s bust and an inscription in Parthian. This is not the case for these magic seals with inscriptions in Parthian. Nevertheless, the style of this motif of a royal hero fighting a demon clearly seems to be Sasanian. Furthermore, nothing opposes *a priori* the idea of attributing it to the third century,³⁷ and this might explain the choice of Parthian for the inscription. However, the concomitance of Parthian with a motif that is

never associated with an inscription in Pahlavi leads us to wonder whether we should not look for a reason other than chronology to account for this.

To end this overview, I would like to make a general comment about the use of Parthian on Sasanian objects. Nearly all the objects with Parthian inscriptions presented herein have characteristics more compatible with the first than with the last century of the Sasanian era. At first sight, the presence of an inscription in Parthian can be explained in terms of chronology. This suggests that the use of Parthian as a language for inscriptions would have ceased in the second century of the Sasanian era, in other words by the fourth/fifth century AD; and this, in turn, implies that Parthian, after losing its place as a “royal” language, also lost its place as a “common” language. We can adopt the point of view of Gilbert Lazard:

Parthian subsisted only in the form of local dialects to the benefit of *pārsi*, Middle Persian from the south, which was the Sasanian dynasty’s official language. In the north-east of the Sasanian empire, the place of origin of the Parthians, Parthian dialects were wiped out, perhaps deliberately, following the settlement of military colonies that spoke *pārsi* and that authorities had settled there to cope with invaders from the east. The Persian language that emerged in these areas would, therefore, have come from a form of colonial Middle Persian in the Parthian land.³⁸

For as long as Parthian served as a “royal” and a “common” language, it was used in inscriptions on seals. When it no longer survived save in the form of dialects, it vanished as a language for inscriptions on Sasanian objects.

Notes

- 1 The term “Parthian”, comes from Old Persian *parθava-*, “Parthia or Parthian”, which, owing to the evolution in Iranian from *-rθ-* to *-hl-*, became “Pahlav”, whence the confusion from the linguistic viewpoint of these two dialects (Parthian = a Middle Iranian language of the north-east and Pahlavi = the Middle Iranian language of Fārs in southern Iran), both stemming from a single Old Persian word. To avoid confusion, it is better to use Middle Persian or *Pārsīg* instead of Pahlavi.
- 2 Livshits and Xurshudjan 1989, p. 170.
- 3 Hackl, Jacobs and Weber 2010, vol. 2, p. 588.
- 4 Lukonin 1961, pl. XI: illustration of the plate and pl. XII: illustration of the inscription.
- 5 On this, see Harmatta 1973.
- 6 Harper and Meyers 1981, p. 50–52.
- 7 Harmatta 1973, p. 245–247: *drwšt bryst sng IIIIC XX X II*.
- 8 Livshits 1989 p. 171: *drwst BRY hwn sng IIII C M II*.
- 9 Harper and Meyers 1981, p. 169.
- 10 Harper in Harper and Meyers 1981, p. 50–51 and note 59.
- 11 Gyselen 2008, seals 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16.
- 12 Gignoux 1975, p. 271 as well as fig. 3 and 4.
- 13 Livshits & Xurshudjan (1989: 171–173) list a dozen or more seals with Parthian inscriptions. Several of them lack any characteristics suggesting a Sasanian style. Other seals have not been the subject of publication (for instance, two seals in the History Museum of Uzbekistan: H-159/29 and H-60/19) and it is not possible to assess whether or not they were made during the Sasanian era. The seal published by Herzfeld 1924, p. 77, no. 1 could not be traced.
- 14 Several Sasanian seals with inscriptions defined as Parthian in the collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France bear, in fact, inscriptions in Hebrew: Gignoux 1976, 8.1–8. 30.L.26/8.3 (*cabochon*), 8.4, 50.B.5/8.7 (*dactyloid*), 70.68/8.8 (*dactyloid*). Cf. Shaked 1995: p. 242, n° 13; p. 242, n° 10; p. 242, n° 11; p. 241, n° 4. Others have Parthian inscriptions, but the style does not correspond with what we are used to calling Sasanian; and I would be inclined to attribute them instead to a “Hellenistic” rather than a Sasanian engraver: Gyselen 1993: seals 10.A.19/8.2, 10.B.23/8.9, 20.J.2/8.5.
- 15 Livshits and Xurshudjan 1989.
- 16 Nikitin 1994.
- 17 This title was translated by Gignoux (1977, p. 146) as *chef des buveurs* (?). In a recent article, Bāghbidi (2011) has suggested that *mayhārān-sālār* refers to a wine merchant (*may* “wine”, and *hār* < *ir. *harH-* “engage in trade, exchange”). According to him, this office would have been placed under the *wāzārbed*. Rōz-būd was, of course, no ordinary wine merchant. The attributes of this office-holder emphasise his status. He very likely played a major role in supplying and distributing wine at the imperial court or in controlling the production of wine in the empire and trade in it.
- 18 Bivar 1969, AA1.
- 19 Manguin 2004, p. 299, fig. 12.14.
- 20 Bivar 1969, AA2.
- 21 Huyse 1999, vol. I, p. 59, §46–47.
- 22 Sebeos 1999, p. 49, 101.
- 23 Baratte, Bopearachchi, Gyselen, Sims-Williams 2012.
- 24 BnF 20.C.8/4.25. Gignoux 1976, p. 35, 4.25.
- 25 Gignoux 1976, p. 65, 8.6.
- 26 Livshits and Xurshudjan 1989, p. 172, note 20.
- 27 BnF 20.D.1/8.1. Gignoux (1976, p. 65, 8.1) reads the letters from one o’clock to eleven o’clock as Bactrian (*lao: λao*), whereas Livshits sees them as a Sogdian *wsc* (Livshits and Xurshudjan, p. 172, note 20).
- 28 Gignoux 1976, p. 32, 4.5.
- 29 Gignoux 1976, p. 65, 8.1.
- 30 Livshits and Xurshudjan 1989, p. 172, note 20.
- 31 Bivar 1967.
- 32 See Gyselen 1995 on magic seals in general.
- 33 See, for example, Gyselen 1995, fig. 2a–b, 3a–b, 43a–b, 46a–b.
- 34 *Ptgwb* comes from **pati-gaub-* which means “word (cf. *guftan*, *guy-*) against (something)”, hence “charm, incantation, and amulet”.
- 35 Gignoux 1976, p. 76, 10.2.
- 36 Cf. Shaked 1994, p. 166.
- 37 However, this kind of tunic like an apron in front is not attested in 3rd-century rock reliefs and silver plates: Peck 1992.
- 38 Personal exchange with G. Lazard.

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From Aramaic to Pahlavi: Epigraphic Observations Based on the Persis Coin Series

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The post-Achaemenid coinage of Persis, starting from Baydād and ending in Ardashir V (the future Sasanian King of Kings, Ardashir I),¹ presents a continuous series issued by over twenty authorities and covering the length of the Hellenistic period in Iran.² The series is unique among Hellenistic coinages from the region in that, even in its earliest issues, it does not use the Greek alphabet for its inscriptions. It can therefore act as an important source for Aramaic epigraphy and its development into Middle Persian (Pahlavi) script. The present paper aims to study the inscriptions on the Persis coin series in order to understand the roots of the so-called *Inscription Pahlavi*,³ the earliest representation of that script. The hypothesis is advanced that the Inscription Pahlavi does not in fact represent a logical continuation of the Persis script, and that the inscriptions on the coins of Shapur and Ardashir V, the two “Sasanian” rulers of Persis, in fact show influences from other, non-Persis sources.

The study of the development of Pahlavi, and its derivative and associated scripts, has been a relatively lively subject of research. Much of this, however, has been concerned with the later stages of Pahlavi and has concentrated on the development of the Avestan script,⁴ as well as palaeographic remarks on the formation and use of cursive Pahlavi.⁵ An important issue has been brought up with regard to this matter, and that is the naming of the script itself. Students of Middle Persian often face a puzzling situation when trying to master the language, as the associated scripts are

in fact several, and each has its own characteristics, which leads many specialists to categorise even the languages on the basis of the script variations.

Middle Persian and Pahlavi

It is normally understood that the earliest accessible manifestations of the language are the early Sasanian inscriptions of Shapur I (240–272 AD), particularly his inscription at Ka‘ba-i Zardusht (hereafter ŠKZ), and the famous *mowbed*, Kirdēr (active prior to 290 AD). These are inscribed in what is commonly called “Inscription Pahlavi”, a rather clear script with individual letter types, which except in a few cases, do not resemble each other and thus allow for relatively easy transliteration. This script, however, does use heterograms (or Arameo-grams; MP *Huzwarish*) to render the most common words, as well as the stems of the common verbs, which are then pronounced in Middle Persian, although actually written in Aramaic. Soon after, Middle Persian appears as one of the languages used for writing the teachings of Mani, the third-century Partho-Babylonian religious leader who established the famous gnostic religion of Manicheism. The Manichean script, as it is called, is itself a development of Aramaic, although it is not clear in what relation to Inscription Pahlavi, and takes advantage of clear, distinct letter types and is devoid of the use of heterograms.

* I am greatly indebted to Dr Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis of the British Museum’s Department of Coins and Medals for allowing me access to their great collection of coins, of which some pictures are included here, and for guiding me through them. Unless otherwise stated, the British Museum holds the copyright of all pictures used in this article and they are reproduced by the kind permission of the BM. I am additionally grateful to Dr Michael Alram of the Austrian Academy of Science/Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, for introducing me to numismatics, particularly the coinage of Persis.

The most common manifestation of Middle Persian, however, is in a script called “Book Pahlavi”, or Pahlavi in the strict sense. This is used for writing the secular and, more commonly, religious literature of the Sasanians and the early Islamic period. In fact, the evidence of the script that we have from manuscripts is often much later than the Sasanian period and starts in the twelfth century AD and continues, in the form of commentaries, until the nineteenth century. This script has the disadvantage of using eleven to twelve signs to represent over twenty sounds. Because many of the letter shapes have merged into one, the Book Pahlavi script uses the same sign to render /n/, /w/, /u/, /o/, and even /r/ on occasions. It is further complicated by the very active use of heterograms, whereby most common words and verbal stems, as well as specific concepts such as the word for daemons, are rendered in Aramaic.

A script termed “cursive Pahlavi” is found on earlier documents, even though it most likely developed from Book Pahlavi. These documents comprise various papyri and parchments dated mostly to the seventh century and found in Egypt and various locations on the Iranian Plateau.⁶ This script, besides having all the disadvantages of Book Pahlavi, also presents the researcher with the additional challenge of missing, carelessly written – and thus easily confused – words, and wrong spelling. The decipherment of these documents has been the task of only a few very patient scholars.

Another derivative of Book Pahlavi is the famous Avestan script, used to write the sacred hymns and later ritual texts of Zoroastrianism sometime in the late Sasanian period.⁷ Constructed specifically to record religious texts, and one of the clearest scripts ever created, it employs carefully distinguished signs that sometimes manage to render even the variants on a nasal sound. Nonetheless, Avestan, like Book Pahlavi, has reached us in much younger manuscripts dating from the thirteenth century or later.

It is worth mentioning here that based on the testimony of early Islamic historians (e.g. Mas‘udi), seven different scripts were used in the Sasanian period to render various concepts, probably a reference to the varieties of Pahlavi and associated scripts such as the Avestan.

Origins of Pahlavi?

Here, however, we are most concerned with what preceded the earliest manifestations of Pahlavi. Although the ŠKZ represents the earliest substantial appearance of Inscription Pahlavi and the Middle Persian language, the script in which it is written is actually attested from the evidence of coin inscriptions of Shapur (c. 200–210 BC) and Ardashir V, the sons of Pābag. These were the last two kings of Persis before Ardashir V established the Sasanian empire in 223–224 AD and thus became Ardashir I, the founder of the new dynasty. The coins of these two kings show a formula that in a way anticipates parts of the canonical formula on Sasanian coins

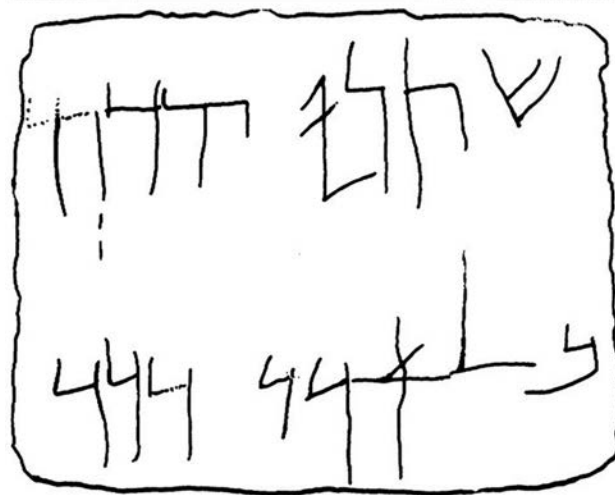


Figure 9.1: The inscription of Failaka (after Naveh, 1995).

up to the early fifth century. The inscription on the coin of Shapur reads:

šhpwhly MLKA BRH bgy p'pky MLKA

Shapur the King, son of Lord Pābag the King

The use of the term *bgy* (MP *bag/bay*, from Old Iranian *baga* “God”) is one of the most obvious points of departure from the inscriptions of previous kings of Persis, which usually followed the formula of “X the King”, occasionally followed by “son of Y the King”.⁸ But what is most important is the dramatic way in which the shapes of the letters on Shapur’s coin inscriptions, and those of Ardashir V, differ from those used for the coin inscriptions of the rulers who preceded them.

The earliest coin inscriptions of the Persis series (e.g. Baydād) present a famous formula for designating the king. This is as follows:

bgdt prtrk' zy 'lhy' br bgwrt⁹

Baydād, the *frataraka* of the gods, son of Bagawart (Bayward?)

The script used for the inscription is quite close to what is termed “Lapidary Aramaic Script”¹⁰ and the letter forms seem to have been adopted from those designed for being carved on stone (see Fig. 9.1).

The inscription of Baydād on his coins in fact shows a remarkable similarity to the Lapidary Aramaic inscription: see Fig. 9.2.

The shape of the letters “b” 𐭪, “d” 𐭥, “k”, and “r” are almost exactly the same as the ones on the Lapidary Aramaic inscription. This simply suggests a close affinity between the Persis script and the type of script used to write Imperial Aramaic, which is close to the inscription above. Similarity of surfaces used for inscribing the lapidary inscription and



Figure 9.2: Line drawing of inscription on coins of Baydād. From M. Alram, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch: Nomina Propria Iranica in Nummis*, p.165.

the coin die is an easy explanation for the preference in using this script.

The general shape of the letters stays the same under the immediate successors of Baydād and no major shift is seen, although in order to meet particular circumstances (i.e. the name of the king) more letters are introduced, specifically “s” and “š” used in the name of Ardashir I. This remains the case until the reign of Dārāyān I (perhaps early second century BC), the first ruler of Persis, who uses the title *MLKA* or “King” instead of *frataraka*, “governor”.¹¹

On the coins of Dārāyān I (see Fig. 9.3), the shape of the letter “d” has become greatly simplified to a simple vertical line (𐭠), and “l” (𐭠) is similarly simplified, with only a small additional half-circle attached to the bottom of the vertical line to distinguish it from the “d”, and eventually even “r” and sometimes “k”. The letter “a”, which previously appeared on the coins of Baydād and his descendants in a shape close to the later Pahlavi form, seems on the coins of Dārāyān to become more similar to the Aramaic form. The most important feature of the coins of Dārāyān is the introduction of the letter “m” (𐭠), which becomes quite a prominent feature on the subsequent coins of Persis because of the constant appearance of the word *MLKA*.

The coins of Dārāyān II (mid to late second century BC), the son of Vadfradād (Autophradates) IV, display the first instance of the appearance of the ligature used to express the Aramaic word *BRH*, “son [of]” (see Fig. 9.4, 9.5).

These coins also display a different type of the letter “t” (𐭠), now more rounded in its right-hand hook. Additionally, the letter “p” (𐭠), previously written as a vertical line with a rounded bend on top, is now made into the semi-circle with a bend at the top, anticipating a development into a full “Pahlavi” letter “p”.

On the coins of Ardashir II (c. mid first century BC), the letter “h” develops from the type on the coins of Baydād (𐭠) to a new, open letter resembling a capital Latin “N” (𐭠). Also remarkable is the new shape of the letter “š”, previously seen as 𐭠 on the coins of Ardashir I, but by the time of Ardashir II written as 𐭠. It would soon, during the reign of Vahšīr, the successor and brother of Ardashir II, come to be written as 𐭠, which is closer to the shape we are used to in Pahlavi (see Fig. 9.6).

One of the letters that changes its shape most frequently is “k”, with nine different forms throughout the Persis series. Among the most interesting is that found on the coins of Pākor II (c. first half of the first century AD). Here, the letter has a more “inscriptional” or lapidary shape, with the main part of the letter formed by a single vertical line with two small extensions on either side of the line, one



Figure 9.3: *MLKA* as it appears on a coin of Dārāyān I (Alram type 558).



Figure 9.4: Reverse of a coin of Dārāyān II (photo by the author).

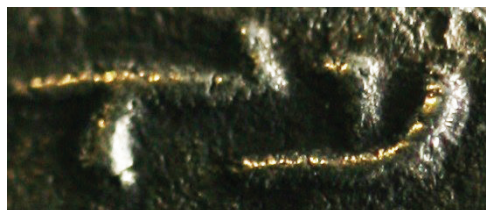


Figure 9.5: The ligature *BRH* on a coin of Dārāyān II (Alram type 564).

pointing left and the other pointing right. In general, the letters on the coins of Pakor II appear to be straighter and less curved, which seems to be the direction in which the whole series is moving.



Figure 9.6: Reverse of a coin of Vahšīr (photo: CoinArchives.com).



Figure 9.7: Reverse of a coin of Napād (late first century AD).



Figure 9.8: Reverse of a coin of Ardashir V/I (c. 210–215 AD).

On the coins of Mančīhr I (c. first half of the second century AD), we are introduced to the letter “č”, which was previously unknown in the series. The basic shape of the letter appears to have been copied from Aramaic *sade* (Hebrew ש) and given the value of “č”, which is common in later Middle Iranian.

The most interesting change in the shape of a letter happens on the coins of Mančīhr II and concerns the letter “m”. Previously this had been written with three strokes, either crossing each other (𐭌) or forming a square without the side at the bottom (𐭍). But now the letter is written as a circle, produced in one continuous stroke that starts at the top, creates a loop, and then ends at the bottom left, with a slightly flattened top right side of the letter (𐭎).

The letters stay largely the same, with only slight changes, for the rest of the Persis series. However, under Shapur and Ardashir V/I, the coin inscriptions begin to differ significantly from the previous versions. A simple comparison will demonstrate the case: see Fig. 9.7 and 9.8.

A comparison of certain letter shapes from Fig. 9.8 shows a dramatic departure from the script of previous coins of Persis. The shape of the letter “p”, in particular, will demonstrate this. From the lapidary to the “normal” Persis form, the semicircular 𐭑, the letter on the coins of Ardashir I takes the shape most recognisable in the Pahlavi inscriptions: 𐭑. The same can be argued for the letters “h” and “k” (which receives an unprecedented shape and additional stroke at the bottom), as well as the letter “b”, which takes its full “Pahlavi” form, with very little resemblance to the established “Persis” form.

Eastern and western influences?

In the light of the suggested departure of Pahlavi, as seen on the coins of Shapur and Ardashir I/V, from the previous letter forms found on Persis coins (Persis “Aramaic”?), it seems necessary to try to find some alternative path of development for Pahlavi, possibly via comparison with non-Persis scripts. This might in some cases be unusual, or even unnecessary, but equally it might prove to be a useful avenue of study.

In his study of the Mandaean script, Coxon follows Macuch in suggesting that it appears to have certain affinities with that of the Nabataeans, although he dismisses Macuch’s idea that this would prove the presence of Mandaeans in southern Mesopotamia as early as second century AD.¹² Cox refers to a passage from ‘Ishodad,¹³ where the latter suggests that the Pahlavi script, particularly its use of heterograms, was created by a servant of the king of “Assyria” and where he calls the Syriac alphabet “Mesene”. On this basis, Coxon argues for an eastern Syriac origin of the Pahlavi alphabet.

A comparison of letter types from the coins of Characene (early second century BC to early third century AD) shows interesting similarities between letters used in Persis and Characene, as well as certain similarities between the scripts of Persis and Elymais. The basic letter shapes in Elymais (mid second century BC to early third century AD, see Fig. 9.9) – most importantly “š”, “m” and “r” – appear to be quite similar to those found in Persis, except for the unusual shape of the letter “a”, which also has parallels from the inscriptions of Tang-i Sarvak¹⁴ and Shimbar.¹⁵ Letter “b” too, on the coins of Kamnaskires-Orodes III (c. early second century AD), has a shape that is unique. Not only is it dissimilar to the Persis shape, it also exhibits a dramatic shift from the Aramaic script.

The coins of Characene (see Fig. 9.10) likewise show similar letter shapes to those of Persis, including the letter “m”, as well as “g”, “l” and “z”. The shapes of the letter “y”, which is reduced to a single dot, and that of “a”, a full circle, are both innovations and seem to bear little resemblance either to the scripts that surround them, or to the Aramaic script from which they are derived. Both of these scripts, despite their similarities to the script of Persis, are quite dissimilar to the Pahlavi script that is used



Figure 9.9: Reverse of a coin of Orodes II (c. 50–70 AD) of Elymais.



Figure 9.10: Reverse of a coin of Maga of Characene (195–210 AD).

for the inscriptions on the coins of Shapur and Ardashir V/I. The development of the Aramaic script used for writing the occasional inscription on the coins of Elymais and Characene seems to be independent both from the Persis script and that of the later Pahlavi.

Eastern dynasty, eastern script?

An examination of the inscriptions on the coinage of the Indo-Saka kingdom (first two centuries AD) highlights the similarities between the letter shapes from this region and those of the terminal Persis/early Sasanian coins. While letters such as “m” and “b” appear to have kept their original, Aramaic-style shapes on the coins of Abdagases (first half of the first century AD) and Sanabares (second century AD?), more variable letters such as “y”, “n” and “t” have clearly developed further from their Aramaic origins.¹⁶ Most significantly, the shape of the letter “a”, a commonly occurring letter on the coinage of the Indo-Sakas, appears strikingly similar to that on the coins of Shapur and Ardashir V. Another example is the letter “t”, which appears on the coins of Shapur and Ardashir almost exactly the same way as it does on the coins of the Indo-Saka ruler Prahata (Alram’s “Pahlava”, perhaps late second century AD).

Still more recently, the last king of the Indo-Saka line, who was defeated and replaced by Ardashir during his eastern campaigns, uses on his coins a script quite similar to that of Ardashir. Farn-Sāsān (c. 210–223?), as he is called, uses an “r” that is very similar to the “Pahlavi” letter of the same value, and his letter “s” is entirely different from

what one sees on the Persis coins, although it is fair to say that it is not a Pahlavi “s” either. Sadly, the letter “s” does not appear on the coins of Shapur or on the early coins of Ardashir as king of Persis. However, its occurrence on Ardashir’s coins after he founded the Sasanian dynasty shows that the letter is indeed similar to the shape used by Farn-Sāsān (see Fig. 9.11).

Michael Alram has previously argued that Ardashir’s eastern campaigns followed those in the west of Iran and Mesopotamia, and took place after his issuing of coins in Hamedan and Ctesiphon (mints B and C).¹⁷ Alram thus suggests that Ardashir already had a well-developed coinage before he reached Sakastan and the territory of the Indo-Sakas, specifically that of Farn-Sāsān.¹⁸ This is specifically argued based on the appearance of a fire-altar on the back of Farn-Sāsān’s coins, which Alram attributes to the influence of Ardashir’s coinage, and sign of the former’s submission to the latter (see Fig. 9.12).

However, it has also been suggested by some, including Marek Jan Olbrycht,¹⁹ that the “Sasanian” dynasty itself might have originated from further east than Persis, indeed from the territory of the Indo-Sakas in Sakastan. This is an intriguing suggestion, considering the mysterious origins of the name Sāsān, the eponymous ancestor of the Sasanians, and its apparent abundance in the Indo-Saka territory,²⁰

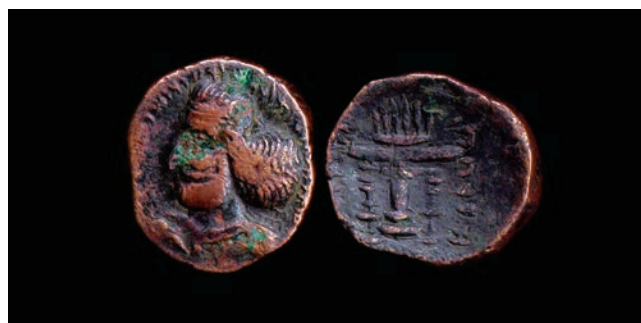


Figure 9.11: Obverse of a coin of Farn-Sāsān, showing part of the inscription; on the reverse, an altar (photo courtesy of T. Mallon/Griffterrec).



Figure 9.12: Gold issue of Ardashir V/I as the Sasanian King of Kings, including the standard Sasanian obverse formula and the altar on the reverse.

including its appearance as part of the names of Farn-Sāsān and his father Adur-Sāsān. In view of the remarkable similarities between the script used for the coinage of Shapur and Ardashir V and those of the Indo-Saka kings such as Farn-Sāsān, or even Sanabares, an investigation into the eastern origins of the Sasanian family might prove fruitful. Detailed observation of the development of the fire altar, which appears to be an important part of the suggestion that the coins of Farn-Sāsān copied the motif from the issues of Ardashir – instead of the other way round – might eventually be useful in establishing the chronology of the coinage of Ardashir.

It also remains to be seen how the script of the coinage of the Indo-Saka could have influenced the local issues of Ardashir and his older brother. What implications this might have, and in what way the comparison of the scripts might help us in deciphering the inscription of coins such as Ardashir's so-called "successor" issue,²¹ which were minted in Sakastan, remain to be seen.

Notes

- 1 See M. Alam 1986.
- 2 For the argument that Baydād was not in fact the first issuer of the coins in the series, see Curtis 2010, p. 379–396; also Hoover 2008.
- 3 Recently, experts including Rika Gyselen and Philippe Gignoux appear to prefer the term Parsig for the script. See the introduction to the new volume of *Res Orientales*: Gyselen 2012; and in this volume. Here, I use the terms Inscription Pahlavi or simply Pahlavi to denote the form of the script that appears in early Sasanian inscriptions and is most prominent on Sasanian coin issues.
- 4 See Frye 2006: p. 57–60, who has a rather straightforward, if not always very insightful, narrative of this development.
- 5 Weber 2007a, p. 185; also see footnote 3 above.
- 6 For an introduction to the Pahlavi documents of the Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, see Azarpay, Martin, Schwartz and Weber 2003, p. 17–29. For their publications, see Gignoux 2010. A newer collection, the so-called "Tabaristan Archive", has also been published: Gignoux 2012.
- 7 Weber 2010, p. 255–263.
- 8 For example, the case of Napād and Nāmbēd: see Alam 2008 for the full list of inscriptions.
- 9 Klose and Müsseler 2008, p. 34 (plate 2/3a, where the name *bgwrt* is visible).
- 10 Naveh 1995, p. 1–4.
- 11 Wiesehöfer 2001. For alternative readings of the name, see Naster 1970, p. 74–80. See also Soudavar 2009, p. 422–423.
- 12 P. Coxon 1970, p. 16–30.
- 13 C.S.C.O. cxxvi (1950), 6.11. 20–27.
- 14 Henning 1952, p. 151–178.
- 15 Bivar and Shaked 1964, p. 265–290.
- 16 For these coins and analysis of their inscriptions, see Alam 1986.
- 17 Alam 2007, p. 227–242.
- 18 Nikitin 1994, p. 67–69; see also Alam 2007 for a discussion of the sequence of Ardashir's coinage as it relates to that of

Farn-Sāsān.

- 19 See Olbrycht in this volume.
- 20 Schwartz 1996, p. 253–257.
- 21 Alam & Gyselen 2003: Ardashir type VIII/3a.

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Parthian Studies: Two New Notes

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The Parthian era is considered one of the most important and under-studied periods in the history of the region that is now Iran. Although the data from texts associated with this period is very small and insignificant, archaeological evidence testifies to the greatness of the culture and art of the Parthian era. The cultural heritage associated with this era has been discovered over a vast expanse, from the borders of China and Central Asia, all the way to Mesopotamia and Syria in the west.¹

On the other hand, the omission and distortion of the Parthian heritage by the Sasanians is in an important issue.² This deliberate omission of the Parthian heritage from Persian history and literature can be traced through Sasanian texts and, even more importantly, through post-Sasanian texts. These include some of the neglected texts of the Parthian period, such as the Master of Tus; Firdowsi in the *Shahnameh* claims only to have heard its name.³ However, given that the oral tradition has played a significant role in the formation of Persian history and literature, there are certainly avenues for the transmission of data, no matter how meagre, and such data acquires additional importance as there is so little surviving evidence for the Parthians.⁴

In this article, I would like to present two notes discussing points arising from post-Sasanian texts.

Note 1: Ardavan (Artabanus) *Aqdam* (First) or Ardavan *Afdom* (the Final, the Last)

In *Mojmal al-Tawarikh wa al-Qasas* we find:⁵

Ashk ibn Dara ibn Darab, Ashk ibn Ashkan, Shapur ibn Ardavan ibn Ashk, Bahram ibn Shapur ... Ardavan ibn Balashan, the Great Ardavan ibn Ashkanan ... *The younger Ardavan Afdom*; Ardavan has been referred to in *Sayr-al-Moluk* as: *Aqdam*, meaning the last.

And also:⁶

The first Sasanian king was Ardashir Babakan ... In this period Ardashir fought many kings and killed Ardavan, the last Parthian King of Kings, who was named *Aqdam* = "the First". When he was killed by Ardashir, and when his [Ardavan's] head was kicked by him [Ardashir], at that moment Ardashir was called *Shahanshah* ...

Zayn-al-Akhbar writes:⁷

Ardavan (is the son of Balash), (nicknamed) *Afdom*. Yazdgerd [Yazdigird] (is the son of Shahriyar), (nicknamed) *Afdom King*. Ardashir-e Babakan killed Ardavan and called himself King of Kings (of Iran).

Tha'labi also writes:⁸

Tabari has said that their first was King *Aqfur* who reigned for sixty-two years. He (King *Aqfur*) reigned over Ctesiphon and most parts of the lands of Iraq and Fars and the kings called him king and for him in the name of friendship and not in the name of tribute, they sent gifts.

... He then went to war with the Romans and took his revenge for Dara ... King Ardavan, son of Bahram, son of Balash: the last king of Parthia. He was called as "*the younger Ardavan*" by the Arabs, as according to some reports, after him another Ardavan became king, who was called by the Persians "*the Great Ardavan*". He is considered the greatest king of the Parthians with larger territory, higher respect and the most famous name.⁹

It is assumed that Muslim scholars not only used the Pahlavi term "*Afdom*" ("last") for Ardavan, but that they also described Ardavan as "*Aqdam*" ("first"). That is to say both the *first* and the *last* Parthian king; in Persian literature, the use of two contrasting terms, such as "the Benefactor

(*Niku-kar*) Ardashir” and “the Offender (*Bezeh-kar*) Ardashir”, is common (cf. Tabari: 1983, 607, 627). The Sasanian sources, both written and oral, led to the Islamic sources focusing on the “*Afdom* King” of the Parthians; Ardavan being trampled beneath Ardashir Babakan’s feet provides clear evidence for Ardavan being “the last”.

Here I want to look more closely at the word *Afdom*. According to Nyberg, the term *Afdom* (> OIr *apa-tama, MPrs. ‘bdwm, Paz. Awadum, MP II. 1974, 37) in the Sasanian texts has a very specific meaning and has been used as “the *last* and the *final*(ly)” and the like (Mackenzie: 1971, 3). This term, apart from appearing with this meaning in Sasanian texts, is also traceable in Islamic texts.¹⁰

It is obvious that through copying many errors have occurred in the Persian texts. Using the letter “F” instead of “P”; or “P” instead of “F”; “K” instead of “G”; “P” instead of “B”; L instead of K/B and vice versa – these are common errors in Persian manuscripts. Therefore, it cannot be ignored that in many Persian texts “*Ardavan-e Aqdam*” should be read as “*Ardavan-e Afdom*”. This confusion is the result of the historical problem of scribal error in the Persian language.

It is also obvious that when there is a discussion in Persian texts about “*Ardavan Aqdam*”, it refers to Ardavan, the last Parthian king. It is also clear that in all Islamic sources the Parthian dynasty starts with Ashk (Arsaces) ibn Ashk or Ashk ibn Dara. The existing texts refer back to Sasanian sources, and more precisely to the battle between Ardashir, the first Sasanian king, with the last Parthian king, namely Ardavan. Information about the first Parthian king in Islamic sources is meagre. Furthermore, the geographical extent of the kingdoms of *Ardavan Afdom* and *Ardavan Aqdam* is very similar, and comparable to the geographical extent of the kingdom of Ardavan in *Karnameh Ardashir Babakan* and Firdowsi’s *Shahnameh*.¹¹

It is not surprising that *Afdom* can be understood with the aid of other literary texts of the Persian language. Early Persian poets use *Afdom* to mean “the last” and “the end”, or “final”.

Divan-e Rudaki:¹²

Finally (>be *Afdom*): you will be placed in dust upon your death
As your birth was from dust
Beware not to be deviated from the right path
As you will be sent to hell at *last* (>be *Afdom*)

Abu Shokur Balkhi:¹³

Now what should be done at the *end*? Except for you to sweep
the house with your tail ...

Asadi Tusi:¹⁴

Do not move with uncertainty, as this would *ultimately* lead
you to hell ...

Note 1: Conclusion

Without doubt *Afdom* (cf. *bāfdom*) is one of the most recognised words in Middle Persian. Islamic sources provide additional evidence for its interpretation. This term was simply used to convey the concept of “the last” and “the latest”. Therefore, it is obvious that “*Ardavan Afdom*” refers to Ardavan (Artabanus) IV, the last Parthian king.

It is also clear that “*Ardavan Aqdam*” or “*āqdam*” is an incorrectly written variant of *Afdom*, which has been introduced through scribal error. The evidence of *Sayr-al-Moluk Azarwan* is an example of this. In several pages of *Majmal-al-Tawarikh* (2009) we witness the correct use of *Ardavan Afdom* but elsewhere (p. 60) we suddenly encounter *Ardavan Aqdam* who was killed by Ardashir Babakan. The probability that in some texts *Aqdam* is no more than a corruption of *Afdom* cannot be ignored.

This case of *Aqdam/Afdom* reminds us of the occurrence in Islamic texts of the terms *Ardavan Akbar* and *Ardavan Asghar* (“the older Ardavan” and “the younger Ardavan”). It should be noted that in none of the Islamic texts is there to be found a similar report as the description of *Ardavan Aqdam* and it is not clear to whom the *Ardavan Aqdam* refers. Given that the term *Aqfur* is unusual and not recorded in any Persian glossaries, I would like to put forward the suggestion that *Aqfur*, which occurs in some Islamic texts, could also be a modification of *Afdom/Aqdam*.

Note 2: Parthian Genealogy

Firdowsi writes:¹⁵

*Konun ay sarayandeh fartut-e mard
suy-e gah Ashkanian baz-gard*

*Bozorgan ke az tokhm Arash bodand
dalir o sabokbar o sar-kesh bodand*

(The grandees, who were from the seed of Arash/ were brave
and chivalrous)

*Cho bar takht-eshan shad beshandand
Moluk tavayif hami khandand*

*Cho kutah shod shakh o bikheshan
naguyad jahan-dideh tarikhesan*

*Az ishan joz az nam nashnideam
na dar nameh khosravan khandeam*

Tabari writes:¹⁶

Ashk son of Ashkan, after whom Shapur, Gudarz, Bijan ... Narsy ... the Parthian Ardavan, Khosrow, Balash, the younger Ardavan and then Ardashir son of Babak became the king.

It is also said¹⁷ that:

Ashk, son of Ashkan, is one of the children of *Kay-Qobad* ...

Further, it is said:¹⁸

From the Parthian, King Aqfur, son of Balash, son of Shapur ...

Tha'labi writes:¹⁹

The Parthians reigned over Iraq and near Persia and the Jibal and the Roman Emperor over Mosul and the Hephthalites ruled over Balkh. These kings considered the Parthian kings as great. It has been said that Ashkan was among the children of the great Dara. Also it has been said that he was one of the children of *Ashkan ibn Kay Arash ibn Kay-Qobad* and there is dispute over the Parthian ancestry.²⁰

Ma'sudi said:²¹

Afrasyab was after Nothar, who he was son of Atuj son of Taser son of Rami son of Aras son of Burak ...

The first king of Moluk-al-Tavayif was Ashk son of Ardavan son of Ashkan son of the oppressor²² ... *Siavash, son of King Kay-kavus*. Ardavan, Shapur, Neyzar ... reigned after Khosrow, his son Balash ibn Khosrow, after Balash his son Ardavan ibn Balash.²³

Maqdasi:²⁴ in the account of Moluk-al-Tavayif, who are called the Parthians (the Arsacids):

The Parthian Ashk reigned for ten years ... then Bizhan reigned for twenty-one years, later Jowzar, Narse ... Ardavan for twelve years ... Balash ... then the younger Ardavan for thirteen years and then the Moluk-al-Tavayif kingdom came to an end and the monarchy fell to the Sasanian.

Mojmal al-Tawarikh wa al Qasas:²⁵

Ashk ibn Dara ibn Darab, Ashk ibn Ashkan, Shapur ibn Ardavan ibn Ashk, Bahram ibn Shapur ... Ardavan ibn Balashan, the older Ardavan ibn Ashkanan ... the younger Ardavan *Afdom*.

It seems that for the genealogy of the Parthians we are faced with two lines of tradition. First, one that has a purely historical basis; and a second that incorporates elements of mythology. The question of how the Parthians served the Kayanid kings and found their way into the national epic of Iran²⁶ has been repeatedly studied. Here I would like to focus on the question of the relationship of the Parthians with the legendary Arash the Archer. Is it accidental or intentional?

It is well known that the Parthians are famous in history for both warfare and archery and that their skills in archery influenced the West. Skillful Parthian archers were able to take the enemy by surprise in the shortest possible time under a shower of arrows. References to Parthian archery can also be found on Parthian coins. Based on both oral and written evidence, Arash is known in Iranian mythology for his skills in archery. The name Arash appears in both the Avestan and Middle Persian texts.²⁷

Maqdasi writes:²⁸

Then Manuchehr became king ... Afrasiab was a Turk who aimed to avenge his father and he put Manuchehr under siege for years. Then they agreed that Afrasiab should give him one shot of an arrow from his country. So they told a man named Arash to shoot an arrow, and he was a strong and agile man ...

I would like to conclude by emphasising how the great Khorasan region, which is associated with the birthplace of the Parthians and with the archery of the legendary Arash, is the place of origin of Iranian myths and beliefs. It is the largest and most important region for the recording Iranian history, traditions and culture in the early Islamic period (post-Sasanian texts).

In conclusion, I would like to propose the following as possible solutions to the issues raised in this article.

1. The reputation of the Parthians as skillful archers could have been instrumental in integrating the myth of Arash into Parthian mythology.
2. The sense of national identity created in Iran after the Parthian victory over the Seleucids could then have been used to incorporate Arash as a character who was crucial in establishing the geographical boundaries of Iran.
3. The assumption that Arash might be a corruption of Arshak cannot be valid, as Islamic texts distinguish clearly between the two and do not suggest any confusion.
4. There is no evidence to prove that the Parthians created a genealogy in which they could claim descent from Arash: cf. Sasanian genealogy and their relationship with Daray-e Darayan, the last Achaemenid king. However, the manufacture of such a pedigree was not so unusual in ancient Iran: cf. the tale of Bahram-e Chubineh, *Shahnameh* (2003, p. 1683).

Notes

- 1 Akbarzadeh 2007, p. 1.
- 2 Daryaei 2005, p. 202.
- 3 *Shahnameh*, 2003 ed., p. 1177.
- 4 Navabi 1996, p. 7.
- 5 2009, p. 32.
- 6 2009, p. 60.
- 7 2006, p. 62–63, 84.
- 8 1989, p. 284–286.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 299.
- 10 Cf. Moin 1992, p. 324; Dehkhoda 1346, p. 491, 3076.
- 11 Cf. *Al-Kamil*, by Ibn Athir 1986, p. 49.
- 12 1999, p. 73, 88.
- 13 1991, p. 104.
- 14 1975, p. 5.
- 15 2003, p. 1177.
- 16 1983, p. 498.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 499.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 500.

- 19 1989, p. 286.
- 20 Cf. *Al-Kamil*, by Ibn Athir 1986, p. 50.
- 21 In *Moruj-al-Zahhab* 2008, p. 221, 229–230.
- 22 Although this term could be a scribal error for *Arash* (see *ibid.* 221), its adjective (“oppressor”) makes me doubtful.
- 23 Cf. *Al-Tanbiyat wa-al-Ashraf* 2010, 89; *Al-Kamil*, by Ibn Athir 1986, 50).
- 24 2007, p. 510.
- 25 2009, p. 32.
- 26 Tafazzoli 1996, p. 271.
- 27 Mazdapur 1999, p. 360–370.
- 28 2007, p. 504.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL

A Note on Architectural Traditions in Arsacid Parthia: The Round Hall at Nisa

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The Round Hall in the Central Ensemble of the citadel of Mithradatkert (Figure 11.1) is perhaps the most peculiar building of Parthian Nisa, in present-day Turkmenistan. Its layout and constructional technique are particularly noteworthy. The interior hall, a grandiose, circular space with a diameter of 17 m, is enclosed by a square perimeter. The latter work is a precinct, as the masonry of the two parts shows independent construction. The inner ring is only two and a half mud bricks thick and is almost literally inscribed within the thicker masonry of the outer square (Figure 11.2). The spaces between the inner corners of that square and the ring are filled with bricks.

Even before the completion of the excavations, G.A. Pugachenkova proposed a reconstruction of the upper parts of the hall, based on the model of the Arsinoeion at Samothrace: a cylindrical drum with a two-tiered wall, covered by a sloping wooden roof.¹ A careful examination of the remains of the walls at Nisa, in combination with the structural analyses carried out in the course of more recent investigations, suggests a very different shape, however, and disconnects the structure from Hellenistic architecture. A Near Eastern taste is apparent in this hypothesis: an oval dome resting directly on the ground below, with its top probably emerging from the outer square block in the way that will become common in Sasanian and Islamic architecture (Figures 11.3 and 11.4).² The proposal is certainly audacious – for the Round Hall would be much older than the earliest standing examples – and has met with criticism.³ Thus it has been questioned whether the attested inclination of the walls can be explained only by the proposed model, especially in the absence of other Parthian evidence for the technique necessary to cover such a large space with a dome.

As for the measurements: they can obviously be only indicative and it is true that, after decades of exposure

to the harsh Nisa climate, the state of preservation of the wall surfaces is poor. Yet the figures suggesting a slight inclination of the walls, beginning at floor level, towards the interior were derived from less eroded points on opposite sides and should be counted as objective evidence. The observed convergence can hardly be ascribed to mere chance. By contrast, it has been suggested that the inclination results simply from an earthquake,⁴ but in that case one has to assume that this deformation occurred in a surprisingly coherent way all around the hall.

As for the chronological issue, it is true that the date of the Round Hall (150–100 BC) is centuries prior to such technical accomplishments as the brick domes of the Islamic “ice-houses” of Margiana (Figure 11.5),⁵ the brick vault of the Sasanian Taq-i Kisra at Ctesiphon, or the grandiose domes of the early Sasanian period like Ardashir’s hall in Firuzabad and the cruciform hall in Bishapur. And it is also true that the use of different materials in these later cases required different technical solutions. However, their refined construction was certainly not a sudden innovation: it presupposes a long progress of experience and maturing. General building techniques of Near Eastern origin at Nisa are anything but primitive, and the absence of other large Parthian domes provides an argument from silence. At any rate, the Round Hall was certainly roofed; analyses based on structural calculations prove that the hypothetical model is consistent with the available building techniques of the time and that a dome would match the constructional remains ideally. A wooden roof, as suggested by Pugachenkova, should be ruled out on the basis of the same evidence.

Previously, V.L. Voronina had already observed that the technique required for Pugachenkova’s Hellenistic roof is totally foreign to the architectural culture of Central Asia.⁶ Though archaeological evidence suggests

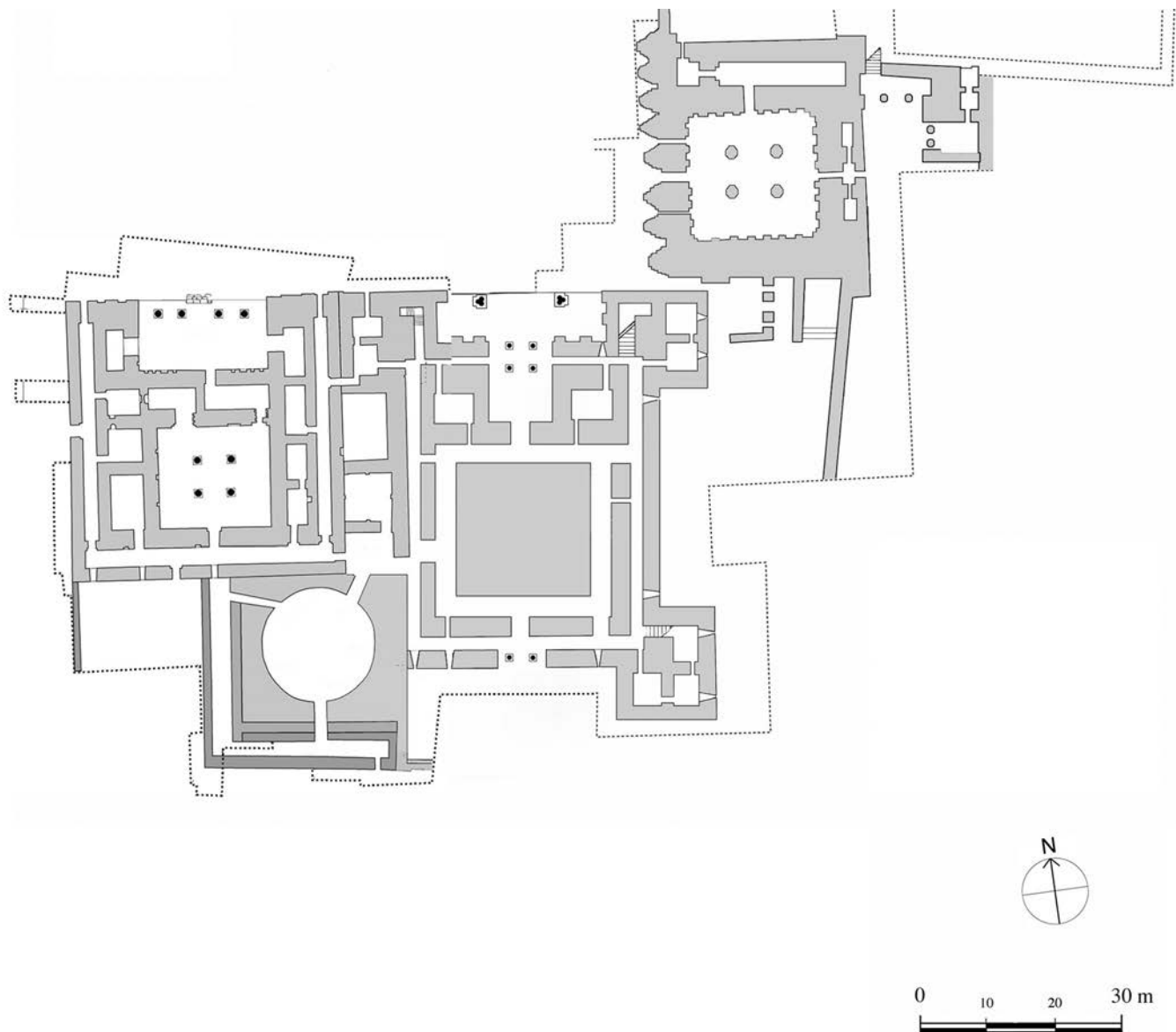


Figure 11.1: Nisa Central Ensemble

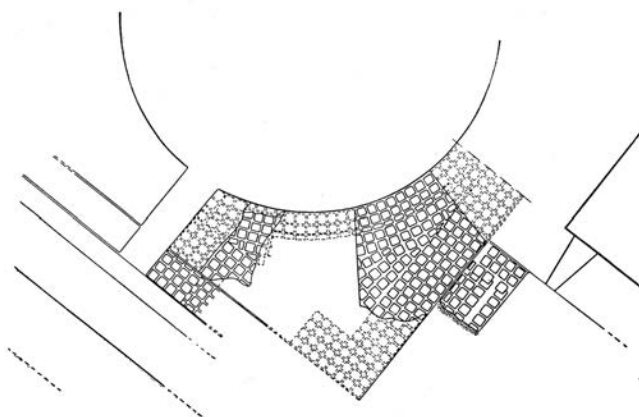


Figure 11.2: Nisa Round Hall constructional scheme



Figure 11.3: Nisa Round Hall

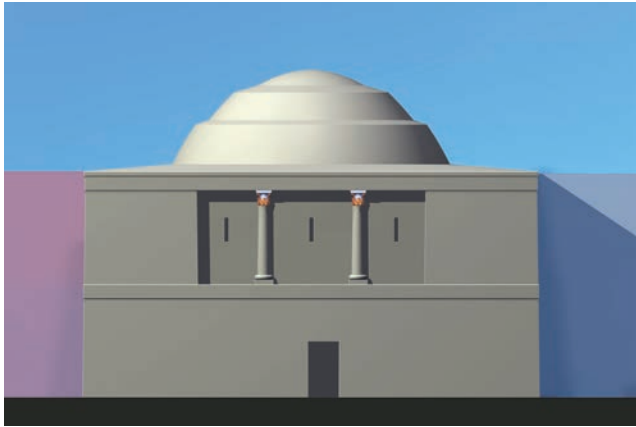


Figure 11.4: Nisa Round Hall



Figure 11.5: Margiana ice house

that wood was used rather frequently in this area, it was in general employed either as a framework for blocks of mud brick masonry, or for roofs of very different shapes based on very different principles. The ideal shape among these was the lantern-roof, which informed the accepted reconstructions of the Square Hall and the Red Building. It may additionally be remarked that, according to the Greek

model, an enormous weight would have rested on a very thin ring, thinner than the outer square perimeter walls, which would be deprived of any precise structural function. By contrast, the assumption of a self-standing dome gives the surrounding square the function of containing efficaciously the outward thrust.

The reconstruction of a wooden roof in the Greek style by Pugachenkova results from a simple formal idea, which was not, however, tested against the available data. On the basis of these data, and using the small section drawing published by Pugachenkova (Figure 11.6),⁷ the hypothetical roof would consist of two shells: a circular one on the inner hall and a necessarily square one on the outside that would presumably rest on the corners of the square perimeter. This design is technically absolutely unlikely, and in striking contrast not only to Central Asian but also to Greek architectural practice. In addition, the amount of timber necessary would be rather high, thus increasing by a large scale the weight of the roof and the risk of instability. Pugachenkova's model is suitable only for a building that is entirely circular, both on the inside and outside.

The excavators seem to have imagined the Round Hall to be roofed by a dome as well, at an early stage in their thinking. This is borne out by the old scale model of the entire citadel (Figure 11.7) now exhibited in the Ashgabat Museum, which was produced at an early stage of field research. Apparently later reflection and the search for possible parallels occasioned the rejection of the dome thesis and the formulation of alternative solutions. Still, as on-site observations and engineering calculations have clearly shown, a dome ranks first among possible alternatives as the ideal roof for the Round Hall.

Judging from the list of domes in ancient Central Asia recently published by Baimatowa,⁸ Central Asian architects were undoubtedly familiar with this type of roof and the principles of the relevant building technique. The evidence is, however, limited to square layouts of much lesser size and to buildings of more modest demand. Dome structures also figure widely in scholarly literature; their use

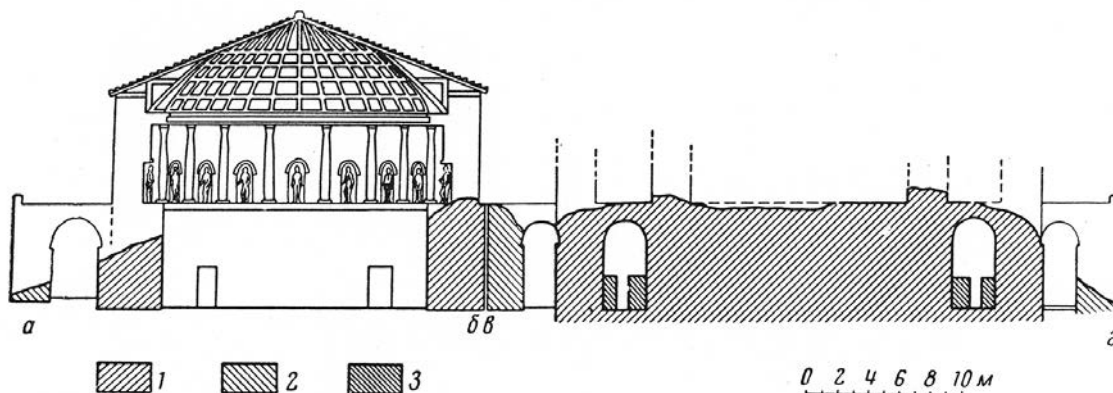


Figure 11.6: Nisa Round Hall section



Figure 11.7: Ashgabat Museum JuTAKE model

has been proposed for a number of imposing ancient Central Asian buildings. Building 2 at Altyn 10 (Figure 11.8)⁹ is an example for the Achaemenid period, and a dome of precisely oval section (Figure 11.9) was reconstructed for a funerary building of the first or second century AD at the Bairam-Ali necropolis (Marw).¹⁰

Archaeological evidence offers additional and more important arguments for domes with square ground plans in ancient Central Asia. The prime structural peculiarity of the Round Hall of Nisa is the structural independence of its inner ring from its outer square. Possibly the idea of inserting a circular room – to commemorate the founder, Mithradates I, and/or other individuals – in the Central Complex was inspired by Macedonian models in its general shape¹¹ and function.¹² The technique, however, and the architectural principles, as well as in a sense the typology of the building, are firmly rooted in local Central Asian traditions. Buildings like the graves of the Iron Age necropolis at Tagisken (Figure 11.10)¹³ provide direct evidence.

Tagisken is situated in Chorasmia, south of the lower course of the Syr-Darya, not far from its mouth on the Aral

Sea. The Tagisken necropolis contains several mausoleums.¹⁴ The earliest date to the ninth to the eighth centuries BC; their layouts and structural features can be compared with the Round Hall in Nisa. The larger mausoleums, nos. 4, 5 and 7, consist of a quadrangular or rounded space in the centre, surrounded by two rings of thick mud brick pillars. The outer ring separates two circular corridors, one inside, one outside; this entire construction is set within an outer square precinct, also of mud bricks; small empty spaces occur in the four corners. Rings of wooden poles were set around the interior mud pillar rings. In the larger buildings, these poles were connected with fences of masonry or wickerwork trellis. Having no structural rationale, it is likely that these elements simply reproduce features common in local domestic buildings.

In spite of their evident formal, technical and functional differences, the above structures share with the Round Hall the layout of the inner structure – a circle in a square perimeter – and the building technique based on centric elements. They also have comparable dimensions, the inner circle reaching up to 14 m in diameter, the outside walls of

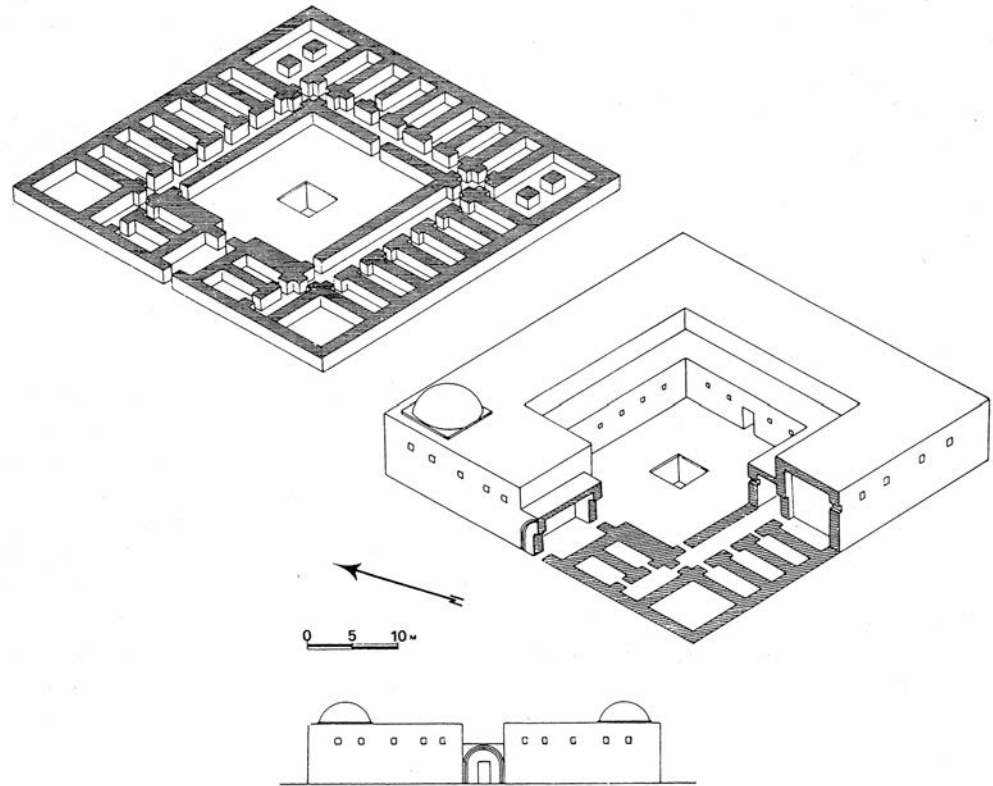


Figure 11.8: *Altyn Tepe*

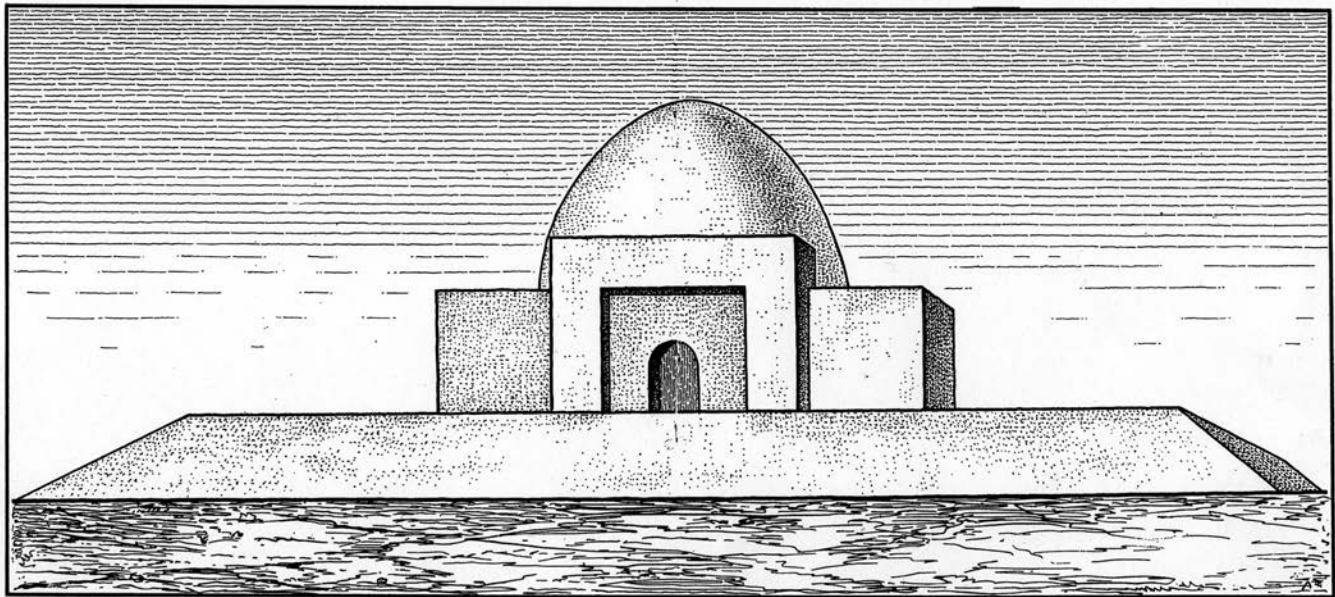


Figure 11.9: *Merv (Marw) funerary building*

the outer square 17.5–18 m. The orientation of the buildings is roughly similar and, finally, the function of the buildings is comparable in a more general sense: funerary at Tagisken, commemorative of ancestors at Nisa.

The Tagisken mausoleums are thought to imitate contemporary common dwellings in their layouts and structural

features, with a characteristic alternation of mud brick and wooden elements. Their elevation is never preserved up to a sufficient height, but terracotta ossuaries may be invoked as evidence for roofing; they, too, are unanimously thought to reproduce real buildings, yet on a smaller, simplified scale. Among the ossuaries, those from the fifth to sixth centuries

ossuaries invites identification of the latter as primarily models of graves rather than being directly inspired by houses. At this point it may be observed once more that the sphere to which the parallels belong is again roughly the same: funerary in the broadest sense for the mausoleums and ossuaries, commemorative for the Nisa Round Hall, a building directly devoted to the memory of deceased kings and the location of certain funerary rituals, hence in a way a cenotaph.

Notes

- 1 Pugachenkova 1958, colour plate in front of p. 104.
- 2 Masturzo 2008; Blasi/Coisson/Ferretti 2008; Invernizzi, in press (a) and in press (b).
- 3 Pilipko 2008, p. 40.
- 4 Pilipko 2008, p. 40.
- 5 Herrmann 1999, p. 56, fig. 49; Blasi/Coisson/Ferretti 2008, fig. 82.
- 6 Voronina 1960, p. 45–46; cf. Baimatowa 2008, p. 209.
- 7 Krashennnikova/Pugachenkova 1964, p. 132, fig. 10.
- 8 Baimatowa 2008.
- 9 Sarianidi 1977, fig. 60; Rapin 1992, pl. 47; Invernizzi 2000, fig. 14.
- 10 Koshelenko 1977, fig. 27; Usmanova/Filanovich/Koshelenko 1985, p. 239, pl. xcvi: B3.
- 11 Compare the *tholos* of the Vergina palace, which was a sacred space, a shrine in a ceremonial palace in the vicinity of the necropolis of the Macedonian kings (Hoepfner 1996, fig. 5; Invernizzi 2000, p. 46–47, fig. 23).
- 12 Philip II erected a *tholos* for displaying a statuary family group in the panhellenic sanctuary of Olympia as an important act of political propaganda towards the Greek cities (Schultz 2009). Similar examples may have inspired the erection of the rulers' statues in the Round Hall (Invernizzi 2011).
- 13 Tol'stov/Zhdanko/Itina 1963.
- 14 On the funerary rituals in the Tagisken necropolis see Lelekov 1972.
- 15 Rapoport 1971, p. 62–63, fig. 20; Cf. Rtveladze 1999, p. 112; *Gosudarstvennyj Muzej Iskusstv Karakalpakskoj ASSR*, Moskva 1976, p. 9, fig. 16 (ossuary from Burly-kala, Kwarezm, 1st–3rd centuries AD).

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Women, Dance and the Hunt: Splendour and Pleasures of Court Life in Arsacid and Early Sasanian Art

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Despite the long history of research on ancient Iranian monarchies, scarce sources considerably limit our knowledge of Iranian court life in the past. This is particularly true for the Arsacid and early Sasanian periods. Iranian written sources, including chiefly early Sasanian royal inscriptions, are occasional, while external information is not only incomplete but its scientific value has frequently been questioned. Ancient authors are primarily focused on conspicuous wealth and ceremonial splendour perceived as signs of licentiousness and decadence.¹ However, that consumption-focused approach is employed to describe the dynasties of ancient Iran often enough to raise doubts about the impartiality of the authors and the reliability of their reports. Given the above, even the smallest piece of information available from archaeological sources becomes vital.

The present study is designed to indicate one more, though probably still incompletely exploited, source of information about court life, namely the architectural decoration of palaces. We largely rely on the assumption that wall, floors and ceilings were decorated to prioritise certain chambers in the overall room hierarchy that must have been established based on the nature of activities intended for such chambers. Viewed in this light, the decorative themes that occur in palatial architecture, if carefully examined, are capable of helping to reconstruct at least some aspects of court life. Its epicentre is usually perceived as lying in the royal capitals. Indeed, ancient authors enumerate several chosen by the Arsacid kings as their seasonal abodes.² The most frequently mentioned among the Arsacid royal capitals is Ctesiphon or a coronation city and a royal winter residence.³ Regrettably, neither the palace at Ctesiphon nor royal structures once existing at Ecbatana and Rhagae or at Hecatompylus⁴ have been archaeologically ascertained. Thus, the structures revealed at Old Nisa continue to be

the only known Arsacid edifices that can be directly linked to royalty. They have implications for our present study as their decoration provides an in-depth look into certain aspects of royal ideology that give us a better understanding of the reasons for the presence of some specific motifs in architectural decoration of the Arsacid period. Although the functions of some of these structures still await identification, it seems evident that Old Nisa became a large ceremonial centre of the Arsacid dynasty after major constructional alterations either in the final years of Mithradates I or soon after his demise.⁵ Essential structures of the centre include the Square House, the Red Building, the Square Hall, the Round Hall and the Tower Building.

Unearthed during recent excavations in the central sector of the site, the Red Building represents an earlier phase in this monumental complex. The Red Building is square in plan, with its main entrance from the north, through a deep portico flanked by two small rooms. Both the front wall of the platform on which the Red Building stands and the rear wall of the portico are faced with a frieze of stone slabs decorated by a continuous series of flutings under a bead and reel pattern. The walls of the Red Building used to be plastered red purple. Coloured plaster was also applied over the floors in two rooms of the Building. The practice of applying dark red purple plaster can be traced back to Achaemenid palatial structures. As argued by the excavator, the colour purple might have carried specific meaning for both the Achaemenids and the Arsacids, and its use may be assumed to have pointed to a link between the Red Building's decorations and royal ideology.⁶

In addition to the Red Building, there was also the Square House in the northern sector of the site, built in the early construction phase of Old Nisa. The purpose of the Square House appears clear from the equipment revealed in place.

Invernizzi argues that the Square House was a ceremonial banquet hall in which royal guests rested on banquettes or benches constructed along the walls.⁷

Sumptuous banquets held at the royal courts of ancient Mesopotamia and Iran have a long history and are richly documented by written records and iconographic sources. Whether official or not, banquets were intended to emphasise the wealth and power of the monarch and to express kingship by means of the copious size of portions, extravagant menus and luxurious tableware. An invitation to a royal banquet was an official declaration of royal favour, an acknowledgement of one's high rank and privileges, as well as a method for strengthening alliances and loyalty, and for uniting élites around the monarch.⁸ Therefore the ancient authors' view of banquets as providing nothing but entertainment to the monarch can hardly be upheld; in fact, banquets were a crucial element of court rituals designed both to enhance the social prestige of the royal court and to strengthen royal power.

Wine, the large-scale consumption of which is proven by capacious storage vessels and *ostraca*, surely constituted an important component of banquets at Old Nisa. It is supposed that wine was served from ivory rhytons stored in the Square House when it ceased to serve its original purpose and became a treasury.⁹ Manassero, following Hoffmann's tracing of changes with regard to the meanings of rhytons with animal foreparts, concludes that, given that rhytons were generally a symbol of Dionysus in the Hellenistic period, the Square House rhytons were used to pour libations in honour of Arsacid heroized ancestors.¹⁰ The acceptance of Manassero's view entails the assumption that the rhytons were not used for this purpose until the fortified residence had been transformed into a memorial and ceremonial centre for the Arsacid dynasty; according to Invernizzi, this change of function occurred during the reign of Mithradates I or his immediate successor.¹¹

It was after the reign of Mithradates I that the monumental structures (except the Red Building) of the central complex were built. These included the Round Hall, which is adjacent to the south-eastern corner of the Red Building, and which is interpreted as a mausoleum or *heroon* of an Arsacid ruler. Discovered among surviving fragments of colossal male and female statues once adorning the Round Hall, a fragment of a statue of Mithradates I is deemed by Invernizzi to support the view that it was actually that king for whom the *heroon* was constructed.¹² Similar monumental clay statues were also used to decorate the Square Hall built during the second construction phase at Old Nisa. Invernizzi believes that the statues from the Square Hall and the Round Hall represent mythical or deified ancestors of Mithradates I.¹³

The purpose of the Tower Building remains unclear. This is the tallest structure of Old Nisa, built in the vicinity of the Square Hall and the Round Hall, and which once had remains of a columned building on the top, as mentioned

by early excavators. Regrettably the remains were not properly recorded before they became no longer traceable.¹⁴ In addition fragments of wall-paintings, which have been discovered outside their original context during recent excavations, cannot be identified in terms of dating and their precise original location within the columned building. However, several fragments have been successfully matched to reveal a scene depicting a battle between two groups of mounted men dressed in the Iranian style.¹⁵ Whether historical or mythological, the scene was obviously intended to glorify the military achievements of the Arsacids and, as such, sat well within the ideological programme of the ceremonial centre.

If the current initial and still imprecise timeline for Old Nisa's construction¹⁶ proves correct, it appears reasonable to suggest that the process of the creation of a dynastic centre was accompanied by the adoption of Hellenistic patterns of the presentation of royal power and majesty. This was surely not driven by anything other than ideological motives and the need to present an Arsacid ruler as one of the monarchs of the Hellenistic East, and the equal of his peers in terms of power.

The particular nature of the structures at Old Nisa prevents their examination from being truly fruitful and yielding extensive information about court life, except the previously mentioned role of banquets. However, when combined with information from coins datable to the time of Mithradates I, it adds to the reconstruction of some aspects of the Arsacids' royal ideology which was undoubtedly mirrored by court life.

Whether the Round Hall, Tower Building and Square Hall were constructed during or after the reign of Mithradates I, it was at this very time that changes in royal ideology occurred. These changes are traceable chiefly in coins minted under Mithradates I. Prior to the conquest of Media and Mesopotamia, coins already started to bear the legends *basileos theou* or *basileos megalou theopator(os)*, which, according to Dąbrowa, suggests the beginning of a ruler cult inspired by Hellenistic culture.¹⁷ Those coins continued to depict the ruler wearing the traditional satrapal headgear, sometimes referred to as the *bashlyk*; his later drachms and tetradrachms, however, portrayed the ruler wearing a royal diadem.¹⁸ Deemed an attribute of royalty but of debatable origin, the diadem seems to be associated with Dionysus in the Hellenistic period.¹⁹

The iconography and legends on coins show that some elements of royal ideology were modified by successors of Mithradates I. These modifications generally consisted of a return to Iranian traditions.²⁰ Regrettably their impact on various aspects of court life cannot be identified with certainty. It seems highly likely that elements such as audiences, banquets and hunts, which were deeply rooted in the Eastern tradition, would have been subject only to qualitative and quantitative changes. Sadly, a paucity of sources prevents any in-depth study.

A similar paucity affects studies of almost every aspect of court life, including royal women, otherwise a rewarding topic that is readily addressed by modern scholars.²¹ It is only very infrequently that royal women are treated at any length in Greek or Latin sources. The exception here is Musa, a slave concubine whom we see promoted to royal consort (of Phraates IV) and mother of a royal successor (Phraataces).²² Usually, however, ancient authors point to a large number of concubines at royal and noble courts. Concubines are normally referred to collectively with other goods, for instance “his treasures and his concubines”,²³ and, as a rule (except for the case of Musa), anonymously. Anonymity, however, did not necessarily entail their unimportance for court life, as there were cases when concubines gave birth to rulers.²⁴

As for royal consorts, the sources usually record only the queen’s name and rarely give her titles. Those that record titles prove that rulers could have several wives, each holding the title of queen.²⁵ These were chosen from the royal family, sometimes including such close relatives as half-sisters, and probably also from Parthian noble families.²⁶ And since marriages were traditionally designed to strengthen internal or external alliances, queens of foreign origin were not infrequent: Phraates II (138–127 BC) was married to Laodice, a daughter of Cleopatra Thea and Demetrius II Nikator; Mithradates II (124/123–88/87 BC) to a daughter of Tigranes, king of Armenia; Sinatruces (77 BC) was probably married to a Mesopotamian woman; Orodes II (57–38 BC) to Laodice, a daughter of Antiochos I Theos and Isias Philostorgos of Commagene; and Vonones I (8–9 AD) to a Scythian princess.²⁷

Royal women surely formed a part of the ruler’s innermost circle and their public appearance was one of the methods to manifest royalty, as suggested by the fact that Tiridates I, the king of Armenia and founder of the Armenian line of the Arsacid dynasty, went to Rome together with his consort in 66 AD. Riding on horseback next to her husband and wearing a helmet instead of a veil, she made an immense impression upon the Romans.²⁸

Ancient sources seem to indicate, however, that Arsacid royal women did not play any more prominent role: they lived in the seclusion of the women’s chambers or harem, lacking any involvement in court intrigues and not participating in entertainments. Nevertheless, the actions of the royal consort upon the demise of the king of Adiabene,²⁹ or those of Queen Talasi’asu of Mesene who, upon her husband’s death, was able to enthrone her juvenile son,³⁰ as well as the appearance of a female portrait and the legend “Lady Rangodeme” on the reverse of coins minted by otherwise unknown local ruler of eastern Iran in the first century BC,³¹ along with other representations of royal women in art of the Arsacid period, all seem to challenge this view.³² Although it is beyond question that depictions of men largely outnumber depictions of women and that this

is typical for Near Eastern art, we should remember that at Old Nisa, among fragments of clay statues and paintings, there were some female representations.³³ Representations of women occur also in the court art of local Parthian rulers and neighbouring monarchies.³⁴ There is no need to cite familiar examples from Hatra or Dura Europos. There is, however, a rock relief at Tang-e Sarvak (Khuzestan) that deserves more attention, for it shows a ruler of Elymais seated and most probably accompanied by his consort.³⁵ Yet other examples worth mentioning are the painting from Kuh-e Khwaja (Sistan), which shows a king and queen seated in three-quarter view on an elaborate throne,³⁶ and female busts in stucco found with male busts at Qaleh-i Yazdigird (western Iran).

Discovered in the 1970s, the castle at Qaleh-i Yazdigird is chiefly known for its rich architectural stucco decoration.³⁷ Given the fact that we still have no archaeological record for any royal Arsacid palace (this being understood to mean a structure combining state administrative and royal residential functions), this Parthian noble’s seat can serve as a complementary source of information on royal court life. This is valid only on the assumption that nobles mirrored kings as much as possible, including specifically their court life and residential design, but this seems a reasonable assumption, given tendencies throughout history.

Since the excavations at Qaleh-i Yazdigird have not been completed, neither the ground plan of the castle nor the precise function of each of the only partly unearthed rooms can be determined. Nevertheless, a group of three large rooms (nos 1, 5, 11) is striking, the ground plans and layout of which are deemed by the excavators to have echoes of the complex of the northern *eyvan* of the residence at Parthian Assur.³⁸ These three rooms have yielded the largest quantity of decorated stucco fragments. If indeed one of the rooms (no. 11, according to the excavators) had the form of and served as an *eyvan*, that is the most important and formal part of a castle, then the neighbouring rooms, although separated by corridors, might have been used for less official but still public purposes.

Geometrical and stylised floral patterns lavishly employed for stucco decorations at Qaleh-i Yazdigird resemble those of Parthian Uruk, Assur and Seleucia. For the present study, however, more important are certain figural motifs that are relatively abundant at Qaleh-i Yazdigird but which rarely occur in Mesopotamian residential decoration. A good starting point for the list of the Qaleh-i Yazdigird figural motifs is the male and female busts. These differ from one another in terms of size, hairstyle and clothing. One of three largest busts was found in fill of Room 1. It depicts a man with his hair gathered in two bunches, within a medallion with an egg-and-dart pattern around its border (Figure 12.1). It is enclosed within a square frame, the upper part of which is decorated with vine scrolls and grape clusters. Although his face has been damaged, a diadem round the temples

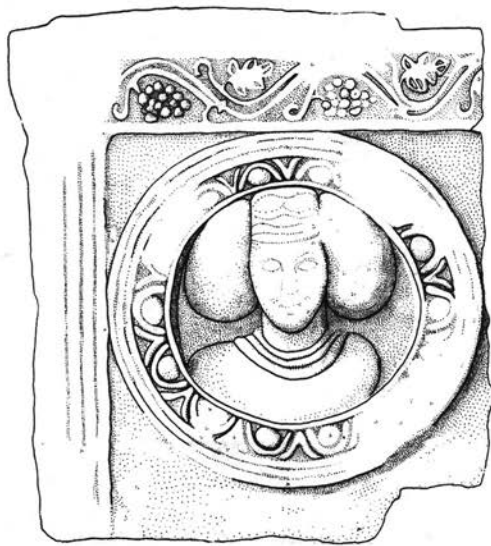


Figure 12.1: *Qaleh-i Yazdigird*. Portrait of a Parthian noble in medallion: a) after Keall 1980; b) courtesy of the National Museum of Iran, Tehran.

is still visible, indicating that he was of princely rank, if not higher.

Similar in size and following the same rule of composition, but far more poorly preserved, is a medallion with a female portrait, found in room fill in the western sector of the site (Figure 12.2).³⁹ A folded garment drapes over her left shoulder to form a V-shaped neckline and leaves her right shoulder uncovered. Similarly dressed is a female depicted within a much less elaborate medallion from Room 11. Unfortunately, her head is not preserved (Figure 12.3).⁴⁰ Interestingly, such a garment is not used for other female busts, whether much smaller examples enclosed within rhomboid frames,⁴¹ or those on figured capitals.⁴²

Assuming that the busts once decorating the walls at *Qaleh-i Yazdigird* depicted real people, it is probable that those who enjoyed the highest prestige had their busts set within medallions. Regrettably the lack of any information about either the inhabitants of *Qaleh-i Yazdigird* or, indeed, general principles for Parthian residential decoration prevents their identification. Of course, the fact that the man is shown wearing the diadem and enclosed within a medallion tempts us to see him as an owner of the castle, and the women as his wives or family members.

Because of the prevailing presence of motifs rooted in Greco-Roman iconography in the decorations of *Qaleh-i Yazdigird*, a feature which is examined in detail below,

the formal similarity between these medallion busts and *imagines clipeatae* ("framed portraits" in Latin) should not escape our attention, although the origin, purpose and meaning of the latter continues to be a matter of debate.⁴³ The oldest known public building exhibiting portraits within medallions is a monumental structure at Delos dedicated to Mithridates VI of Pontus (120–63 BC) and built c. 102/1 BC, that is when the king was still alive. Inscriptions which accompany the busts identify them as friends, courtiers, foreign allies and associates of Mithridates.⁴⁴ In the Roman world, this specific type of portraiture was used to honour both living heroes and deceased ancestors.⁴⁵

In terms of chronological and territorial distances, the portraits of *Qaleh-i Yazdigird* have closer ties with portrait medallions that are painted on the walls and vaults of houses and temples at *Dura Europos*,⁴⁶ which show perhaps deities or actual house owners.⁴⁷

The examples referred to above are strong indicators that in any studies on the meaning and purpose of such portraits, due consideration should be given to the original location where they were displayed. Therefore, if *Qaleh-i Yazdigird* was indeed a residence of a local noble, it is very likely that the people depicted within the medallions were from its owner's innermost circle but not necessarily from his closest family.

Identification of other male portraits from *Qaleh-i Yazdigird*, including the one contained within a *medallion*



Figure 12.2: Qaleh-i Yazdigird. Female portrait in medallion (after Keall 1980).

or *peopled scroll* (Figure 12.4),⁴⁸ is even more difficult, if not impossible.

With its origin traceable back to Late Classical Greek and Hellenistic art, the *peopled scroll* motif gained popularity in Eastern and Western art of the first millennium AD. While

the motif seems linked with the cult of Dionysus⁴⁹ in Roman culture, it is far from being evidently associated with Dionysus in the Qaleh-i Yazdigird context, for the male portrait enclosed by the *peopled scroll* shows a typical Parthian hairstyle and bears no Dionysian connotations whatsoever.

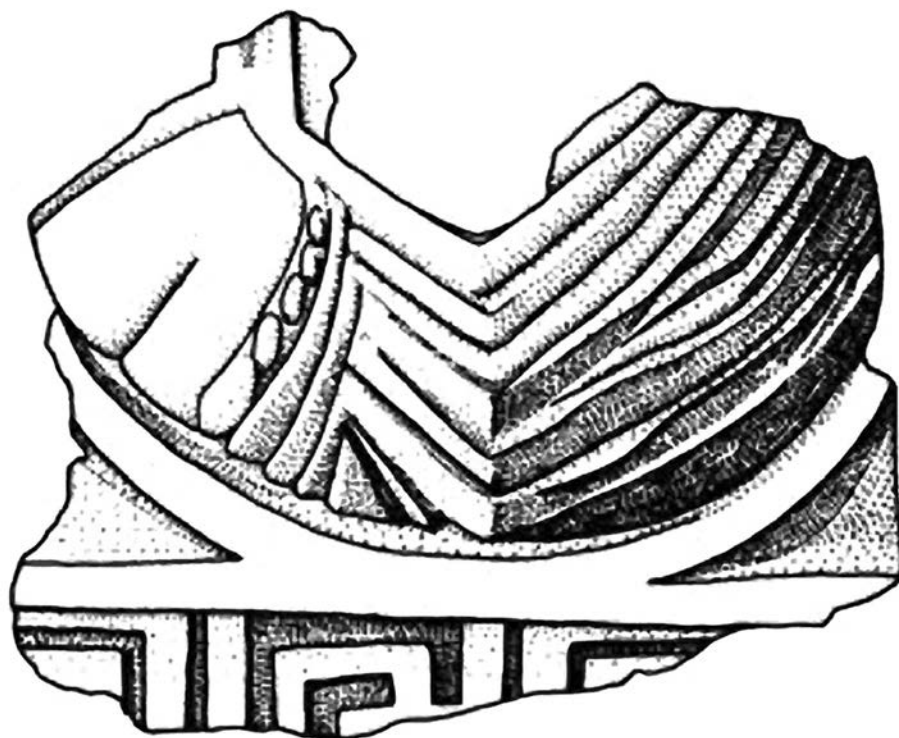


Figure 12.3: *Qaleh-i Yazdigird*. Female portrait in medallion, head missing (after Keall 1980).



Similar problems of identification are encountered for the female busts emerging from acanthus leaves on stucco engaged column capitals. Common in Hellenistic architecture, human-headed capitals have been found also at Assur, Warka and Seleucia in the Parthian period.⁵⁰ However, due to the isolated nature of these Parthian finds, any reconstruction of the decorative programme for the buildings to which they originally belonged is precluded. In Hellenistic and Roman architecture, themes connected with Dionysus were used to decorate such capitals.⁵¹ This is probably also the case for one of the *Qaleh-i Yazdigird* engaged capitals, which portrays a nude figure holding two dolphins by their tails (Figure 12.5).⁵² The Greco-Roman tradition links dolphins with Apollo, Aphrodite or Dionysus. However, the way the figure is holding the dolphins undoubtedly echoes the Near Eastern tradition of representing the Master/Mistress of the Animals.

Deeply rooted in the Near Eastern tradition, including specifically Iranian art, are hunting scenes. These are also present at *Qaleh-i Yazdigird*. They decorate yet another fragmentary engaged half-column, the surface of which is divided into rectangular panels enclosing a nude hunter or animals in an alternating arrangement.⁵³

Outnumbering the scenes with Near Eastern origins, however, is a group of stucco reliefs the theme of which

originates within the Western tradition. The reliefs show scenes with clear Dionysian connotations, such as two Erotes playing with a feline animal, a figure picking a grape cluster from a stylised vine, a reclining nude male reaching for a grape cluster with his right hand (Figure 12.6) and dancers.⁵⁴

The decoration of the engaged half-column reconstructed on the basis of fragments discovered in fill of Room no. 11 also without question has its origins in Dionysian iconography. The surface of the half-column is divided into panels separated by guilloche scrollwork (Figure 12.7). The reconstruction shows a central top panel containing a male figure easily identifiable as Pan, because he is holding pipes and has the hindquarters and legs of a goat (Figure 12.8). The Pan panel is flanked by two more panels, each containing a nude female resting her left arm on a high plinth, her left leg flexed across in front of her right, and her right arm held up to her brow. A similar female figure occupies the central panel in the decorative band immediately below, while each side panel contains a male figure shown in Parthian dress. In the lowermost band, a female figure is depicted wearing a draped robe in the central panel, while Pan appears in each side panel. The position of arms and legs leaves no room for doubt that all these personages are

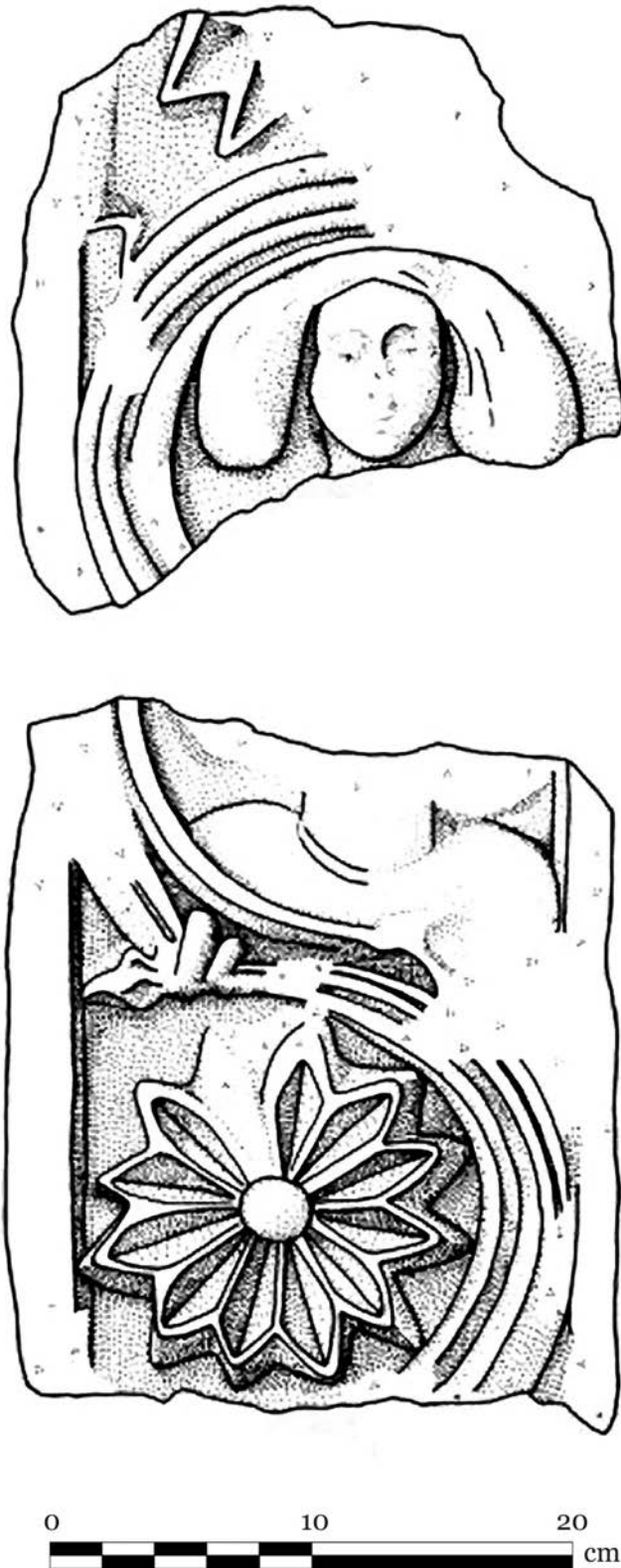


Figure 12.4: Qaleh-i Yazdigird. Male portrait in vine scroll (after Keall 1980).

dancing. And written sources are unanimous in declaring that dancing frequently accompanied banquets and played an important role in the court life of the Achaemenids, Arsacids and Sasanians.⁵⁵ Depictions of dance seem quite popular in art of the Arsacid period. Among good examples are bone plaques discovered over one hundred years ago at Olbia in the Crimea, datable to the first to second centuries AD.⁵⁶ The object which they originally decorated cannot now be reconstructed. They show a ruler enthroned and accompanied by courtiers, nude female dancers and nude male acrobats. Other examples come from Mele Hairam and Merv (Marw), which yielded two bone plaques showing young male nudes⁵⁷ and a terracotta plaque depicting a female dancer, respectively.⁵⁸ While female nudes are traditionally identified with goddesses or specifically with Anahita in an Iranian context, nudity itself does not necessarily allude to divinity; this is suggested by another bone object from Mele Hairam which seems to denote nothing but human youth. The object is decorated with a bearded man, a woman clad in a long robe, a beardless man (therefore presumably in his youth), and a young female nude (Figure 12.9). Of course, as far as the Qaleh-i Yazdigird scene is concerned, it is possible, because of the presence of Pan, that the female nude might actually be a maenad.

The presence of personages usually linked to the Dionysiac sphere next to “Parthians” at Qaleh-i Yazdigird shows how Dionysian iconography from the Greco-Roman world was reinvented in the Parthian idiom. This phenomenon is also manifested in another, though perhaps less spectacular way in the Qaleh-i Yazdigird decoration when a Dionysian motif and a traditional Near Eastern symbol of power and authority are combined to form a single decorative motif: a footed kantharos (wine vessel), an attribute of Dionysus, between merlons.⁵⁹ In Near Eastern architecture before the Achaemenids, a merlon, that is an element used in fortified structures, served a primarily military purpose and, when used in sacral buildings, denoted power, governance and prestige. But already in the architecture and art of the Achaemenids, merlons lost their defensive role in favour of decorative purposes, while probably continuing to convey their symbolic meaning. This was also the purpose of the terracotta merlons from Old Nisa.

Because of fundamental differences between Zoroastrianism and the cult of Dionysus, it seems quite impossible that Dionysian scenes or elements kept their original religious meaning in residential decorations of the late Arsacid period, when Zoroastrianism was already well established within Iranian society. However, certain general messages underlying the Dionysian iconography might have not been rejected or forgotten. For example, Erotes could be deemed never-aging children, or images of perfect youth, or the grapevine could be construed as a symbol of fertility, plenitude and abundance. It seems that Dionysian scenes and attributes present in the decorations

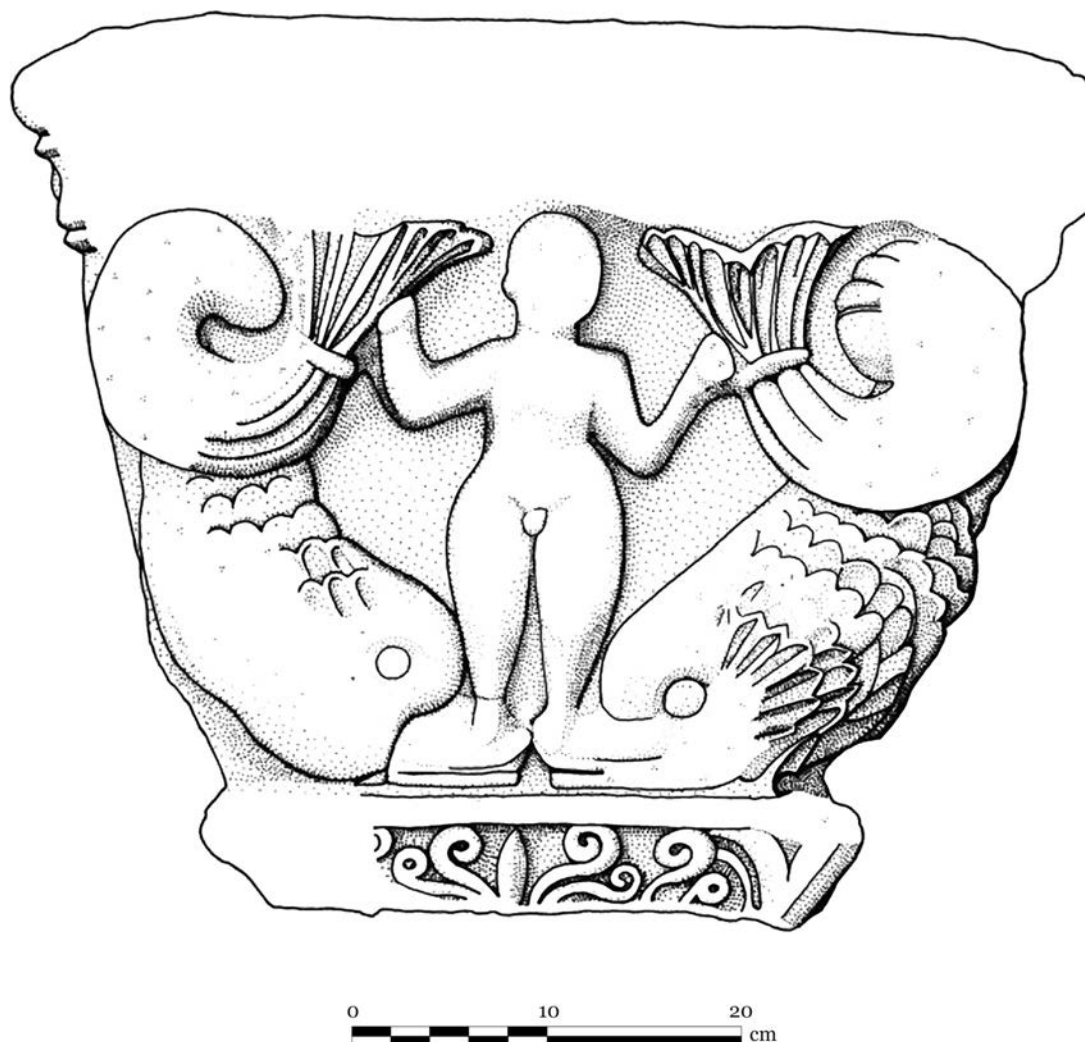


Figure 12.5: *Qaleh-i Yazdigird*. Nude (female?) figure holding two dolphins by their tails (after Keall 1980).

of Qaleh-i Yazdigird were intended to reflect a banquet, its light-hearted atmosphere and pleasures beefed up with wine and dance, thus alluding at the same time to the prosperity and wealth of the castle's owner.

To understand how and why Dionysian scenes were so favoured at the Arsacid court, it is necessary to refer to Hellenistic royal ideology, which largely drew on the myth of Dionysus's conquests in the East. As argued by Versnel, Dionysus became a model for Hellenistic kings, since he defeated mortal adversaries rather than supernatural opponents and conquered real territory.⁶⁰ His mythical achievements made him, like Heracles, a royal god. Alexander the Great regarded Dionysus as his heroic-divine predecessor for the conquest of the East,⁶¹ while some Hellenistic kings openly identified themselves with Dionysus.⁶²

In the Hellenistic period, a diadem was a symbol of Dionysus. Mithradates I, who ceased to wear a traditional

bashlyk in favour of a diadem after his conquest of Media and Mesopotamia, a shift clearly seen on coins minted before and after the campaign, seems to draw on this very aspect of Dionysus as a victorious god. The iconography of coins issued by successors of Mithradates I proves that the diadem was not the only sign that the Arsacids adopted some elements of Hellenistic ideology. This should not, however, be understood to mean that the Near Eastern tradition and Iranian elements of royal ideology were completely abandoned by the Arsacids. Just the opposite: traditional customs were particularly valued by Parthian nobles, who deemed tradition a valid basis for political and cultural identity.⁶³ After all, the concept of a victorious king was deeply rooted in Iranian ideology. Nevertheless, confronted with powerful neighbours both to the east and west, the Arsacids adopted elements of the Hellenistic tradition, thus putting themselves on the same plane as their neighbours. In the course of time, the Zoroastrian religion and Iranian

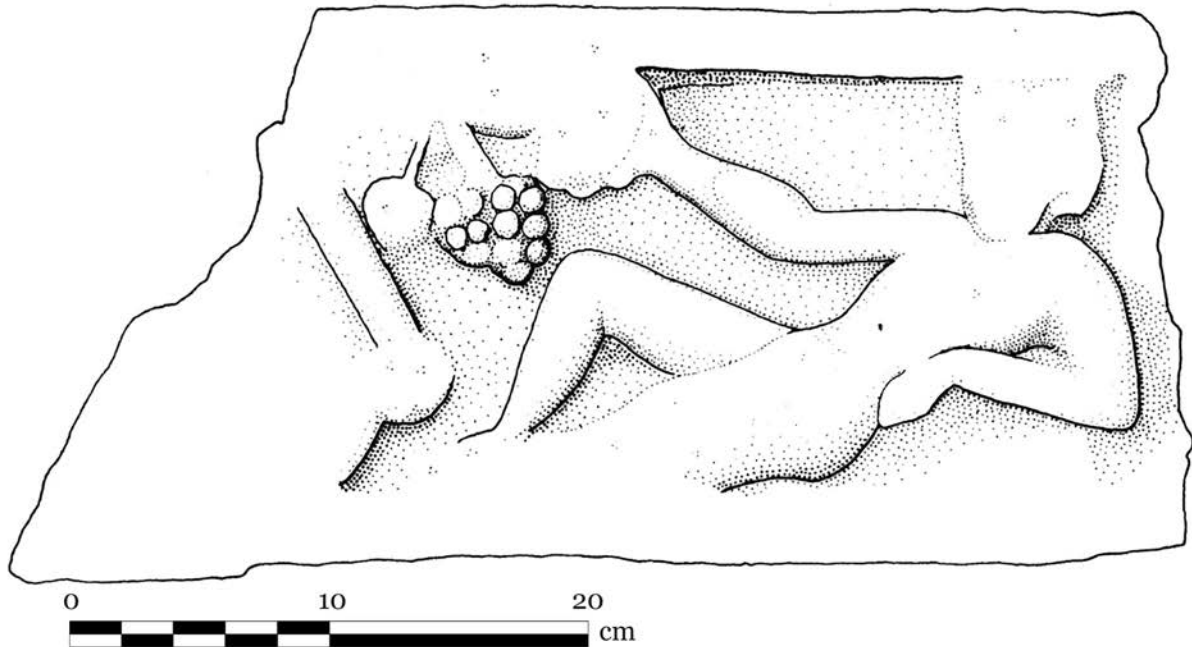


Figure 12.6: Qaleh-i Yazdigird. Reclining nude male reaching for a bunch of grapes from vine (after Keall 1980).

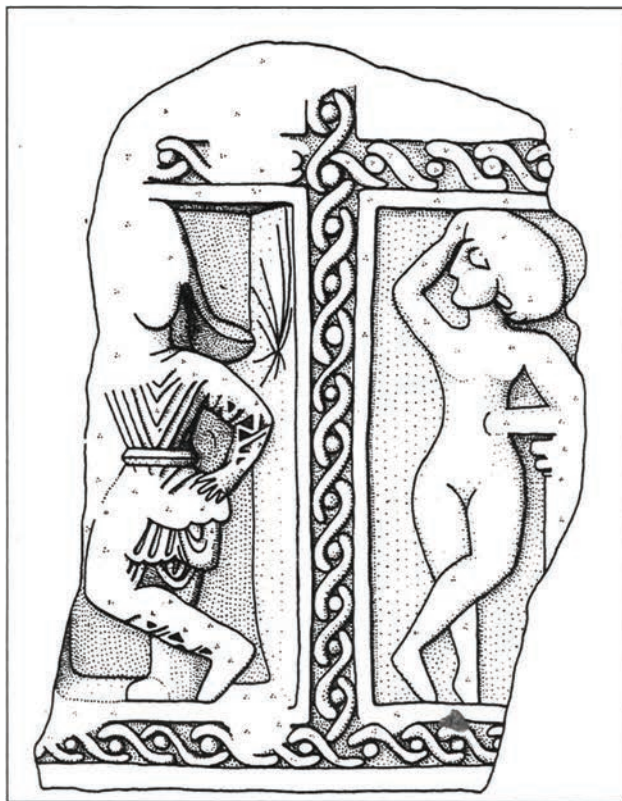


Figure 12.7: Qaleh-i Yazdigird. Fragment of engaged half-column: a) after Keall 1980; b) courtesy of the National Museum of Iran, Tehran.

tradition began to prevail. The latter particularly appreciated hunting and banqueting, which explains why the decoration of Late Arsacid Qaleh-i Yazdigird accommodates so many elements of Dionysian iconography with its wine, joy and revelry, so appropriate to the atmosphere of the banquet.

As no Arsacid royal palace has survived or been discovered to date, we must rely solely on our assumptions or suppositions that their decorations included royal hunting and banqueting scenes, the latter incorporating some Dionysian elements. The suggestion concerning the

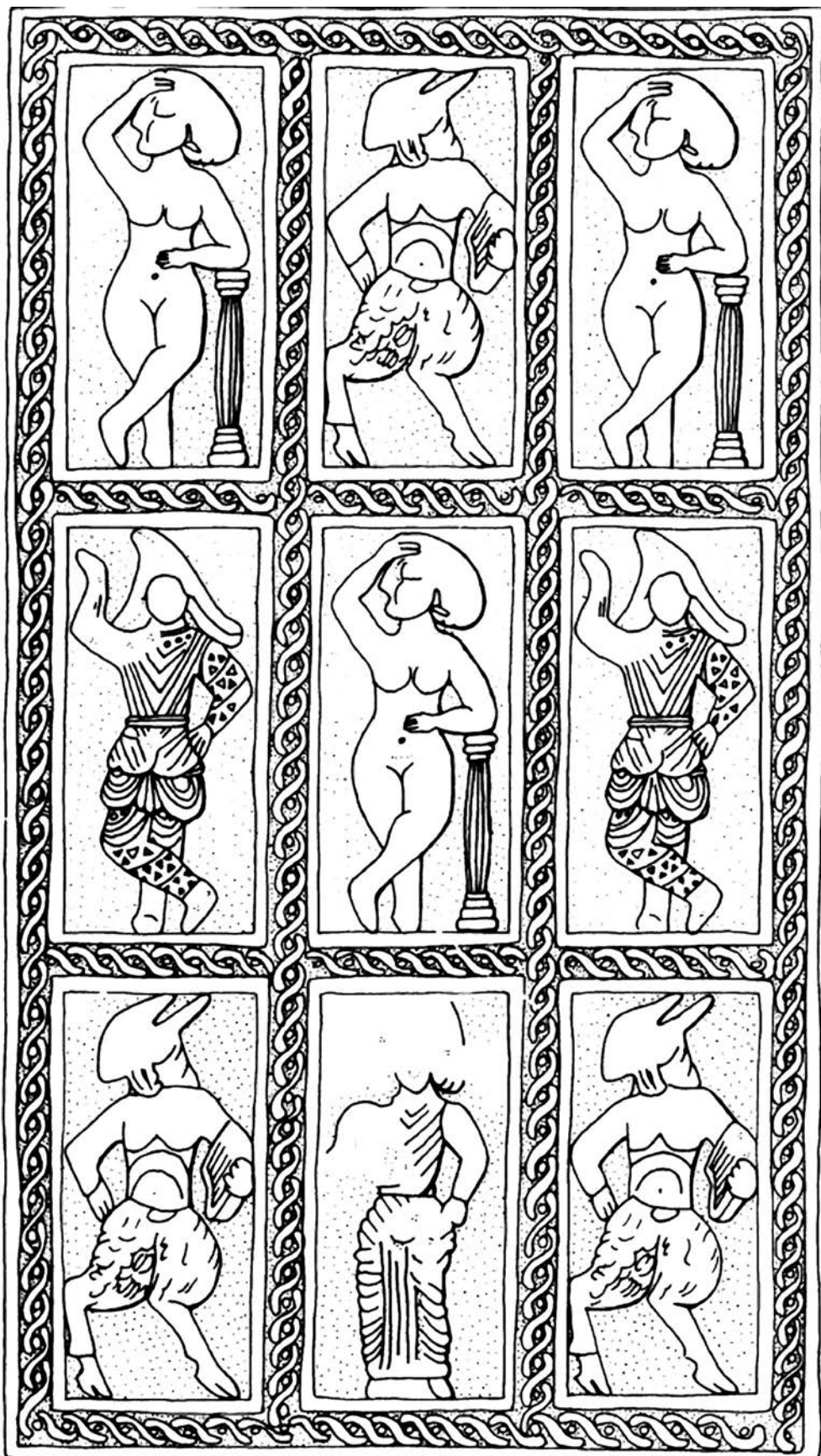


Figure 12.8: *Qaleh-i Yazdigird*.
Reconstruction of the decoration
of engaged half-column (after
Keall 1980).



Figure 12.9: Mele Hairam. Bone hilt decorated with images of a bearded man, a woman wearing a long robe, a beardless man and a nude female.



Figure 12.10: Bishapur: Dionysiac heads (after Ghirshman 1956).

inclusion of a Dionysian component is further strengthened by the fact that motifs for the floor mosaics in two rooms at Bishapur included masks of satyrs, Silenos, Pan and maenads (Figure 12.10) beside half-naked female musicians, dancers and flower bearers (Figure 12.11).

Ghirshman, who first excavated Bishapur, was sure that he had unearthed a sector of a palace of Shapur I, with

mosaic rooms serving banqueting purposes.⁶⁴ For Lukonin, however, the mosaics echoed Zoroastrian feasts, including specifically Nowruz, that were celebrated in the royal palace.⁶⁵ Von Gall, emphasising the Dionysian nature of the mosaic images, argued that they relate to Dionysus as a god of victory and linked them with the triumphal reliefs of Shapur I in the nearby gorge. Such an interpretation



Figure 12.11: Bishapur. Woman playing the harp (after Ghirshman 1956).

was rejected by Balty, who claims that all surviving scenes show a royal banquet.⁶⁶ Recently a new interpretation for the mosaics and a new purpose for the mosaic rooms have been proposed.⁶⁷ Drawing on Azarnoush's identification of the entire complex as a fire temple, Callieri views the mosaic rooms as a space for the Zoroastrian community to gather for a common ritual meal that included wine. In his attempt to explain the presence of Dionysian motifs in a Zoroastrian fire temple, Callieri concludes that they were picked for their eschatological connotations. As there is no mention in Zoroastrian religious texts of any ritual banquets, their existence here is explained as evidence that common religious practice departed from orthodoxy. However, such a departure appears to us hardly possible, given that the Bishapur complex was almost undoubtedly a royal foundation.

As far as the eschatological dimension of the mosaic motifs is concerned, the Greco-Roman world did indeed use Dionysian iconography in funeral contexts, which saw Dionysus as a lord of death, rebirth and eternal renewal. However, the concept of birth, death, the journey into the underworld and rebirth is foreign to Zoroastrianism. And Zoroastrian meals dedicated to the souls of the departed did not necessarily take place in temples,⁶⁸ although it is possible that some ritual community meals were consumed there.⁶⁹

Attention should also be drawn to the fact that Azarnoush's identification of a large cruciform hall at Bishapur as the main room of a fire temple is based on alleged similarities between ground plans of the hall and room no. 104 in the Sasanian residential building at Hajiabad. Azarnoush identified this room at Hajiabad as a temple of Anahita.⁷⁰ However, the asserted similarities are in fact superficial: the hall at Bishapur is a *chahar taq*, while the asymmetrical rectangular room at Hajiabad shares common features with another room of the same complex (room no. 175) rather than with the *chahar taq*. Moreover, if it is accepted that the faithful did not have access to the main room of fire temples, the enormous size of the cruciform room at Bishapur (22.75 m x 22.75 m) seems excessive even for a royal foundation (Room A at Takht-e Sulaiman is not larger than 7.65 m x 7.65 m.).⁷¹ First and foremost, however, neither Bishapur nor Hajiabad has yielded any decisive evidence proving the functions of the rooms that are being compared.

Although Muslim authors assure us of the existence of a fire temple at Bishapur, their reports are rather laconic. Al-Mas'ūdī mentions that the city of Sabur (Bishapur) in the province of Fars has a temple founded by Dara, son of Dara.⁷² However, the immediately following sentences leave it unclear whether the temple was actually located within the limits of the town of Bishapur. This is because of a certain

lack of precision about location in al-Mas'ūdī's writing: while reporting about Firuzabad, he mentions a fire temple in the town, founded by Ardashir, son of Babak (Papak), which he had visited, and which was located one-hour's distance from the town.⁷³ So if al-Mas'ūdī mentions a structure as being in a town, it is likely he means merely in its vicinity. As far as Bishapur is concerned, the location of the temple outside the town seems to be confirmed by Istahri, Ibn Hauqal, Idrīsī and the anonymous author of *Hudud al-Alam*, who mention two temples, both located near the gates of Bishapur.⁷⁴

Given all these concerns, it is more likely that the structure at Bishapur is a royal palace rather than a temple. If this is indeed the case, the mosaics may be viewed as evidence for the continuation of the tradition of using Dionysian motifs which, in addition to depictions of female musicians and dancers, seem suitable for reflecting the atmosphere of court banquets.

Written sources prove that the pomp, opulence and ceremony of the Sasanian court dazzled the king's subjects and foreign élites. Surrounded by their courts, the members of which are known from royal inscriptions and late or post-Sasanian texts,⁷⁵ Sasanian kings travelled between their imperial centres together with their closest family, that is royal consorts, numerous concubines and their offspring. The family and the harem also accompanied the king on war campaigns, sometimes becoming the booty of his enemies.⁷⁶ Traditionally, audiences (rather poorly documented for the Arsacid period), banquets and hunts, all reflected in Sasanian literature and art, continued to constitute an important element of court life.⁷⁷ Just as in the Arsacid period, royal guests participated in banquets, which, in addition to the pleasures of the table, offered an opportunity to discuss state affairs. Guests were seated according to protocol in a strict hierarchy⁷⁸ that symbolically reflected the king's control over the empire. The king himself reclined on the cushions of a banqueting couch⁷⁹ large enough to share with an important guest.⁸⁰ Royal banquets were organised for various significant occasions, including annual religious feasts.⁸¹

The presence of female musicians and dancers among mosaic depictions at Bishapur suggests that music and dance were an indispensable part of royal banquets. This is further confirmed by written sources which point to banquets taking place not only in palace rooms but also in royal gardens.⁸² It is beyond any doubt that, on the one hand, banquets constituted a royal prerogative, involving the consumption of sophisticated meals and top quality wine,⁸³ watching female dancers and listening to music and songs. It is also beyond any doubt, however, that on the other hand, with their clear hierarchy of seats, banquets built an image of the king as the central figure within his empire.

The decoration of some rooms at Bishapur also included stone and stucco reliefs which, unfortunately, have not survived to the extent necessary for a complete reconstruction of their scenes. Nevertheless, given the fact the Iranian

epic tradition couples royal banquets with hunts to form a symbiotic pair, it is plausible that the fragment of the stone relief from the Eastern Mosaic Hall, which shows a charging horseman, used to be part of a hunting scene. Since Ammianus Marcellinus mentions Persian houses as being richly decorated with scenes representing a king hunting game,⁸⁴ it seems reasonable to assume the presence of such scenes in a royal palace, the more so as fragments of hunting reliefs were identified at Ctesiphon.⁸⁵

To sum up, the decoration of both the Arsacid noble residential structure at Qaleh-i Yazdigird and the royal palace at Bishapur does reflect the pleasures of court life: hunts and banquets. Although banquets played an essential role in the court life of ancient Iranian monarchies, they are, however, rarely depicted in art. This is a contrast to the many written sources that describe the wealth and splendour of royal banquets, with their strict rules of protocol and hierarchy.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from this overview of architectural decoration in the Arsacid and early Sasanian periods:

1. There is a clear discrepancy between the programme of interior decoration of palaces and the official art of rock reliefs and coinage as far as decorative themes are concerned, with the former abstaining from scenes of a religious or military nature. Because a similar trend is seen in Achaemenid art, this discrepancy can be deemed a specific element of the Iranian tradition.
2. Elements of Greco-Roman Dionysian iconography that were adopted by the Arsacids survived until Sasanian times, gradually losing their prevalence, as proved by the decoration of the Sasanian manor house at Hajiabad.⁸⁶ The house's wall decoration still displays some elements rooted in the Hellenistic world: figures of a nude child with a bunch of grapes in each hand, medallion portraits and portrait busts, among which Azarnoush managed to identify two portraits of the Sasanian king Shapur II, a bust of Shapur II's son Ardashir, and a bust of Shapur II's vassal, Bahram II Kushanshah. Several other busts represent unidentifiable figures from the Sasanian nobility, all of them "most distinguished personalities of the empire".⁸⁷ Portrait busts were also used, in addition to depictions of female dancers and musicians, to decorate late Sasanian residential houses at Kish and in the vicinity of Ctesiphon.⁸⁸ Having no religious content, these motifs were taken over by early Muslim rulers to accentuate their royal power and prerogatives.

Notes

- 1 A rather different picture of traditional court life is given by Ferdowsi in the *Shahnameh* where sumptuous banquets and light-hearted revels are, however, interlaced with episodes of battle and heroism.

- 2 See Jacobs 2010, p. 87–88.
- 3 Pliny, *N.H.*, 6.122; Strabo, 16.1.16; Josephus, *Ant. Jud.*, 18.48–50; Amm. Marc., 23.6.23.
- 4 For Ecbatana see Polyb., 10, 27; Strabo 11.13.1, 16.1.16; Curtius Rufus, 5.8.1; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.3; for Rhagae – Athenaios, 12.513f–14a; for Hecatompylus, see Strabo, 16.1.16.
- 5 Invernizzi 2001, p. 147; Invernizzi 2001a; Lippolis 2009, p. 54; Lippolis 2010; Pilipko 2007, p. 156.
- 6 Lippolis 2009, p. 57–59.
- 7 Invernizzi 2000.
- 8 Chaumont 1966, p. 471–497.
- 9 Invernizzi 2001a, p. 301, argues that this might have occurred during the reign of Artabanus III in the first century AD.
- 10 Manassero 2012.
- 11 Invernizzi 2001, p. 147.
- 12 Invernizzi 2001, p. 141–147; 2001a, p. 308–309; 2004.
- 13 Invernizzi 2001, p. 147–148.
- 14 Invernizzi 2001a, p. 303; Pilipko 2001, p. 197–198.
- 15 Pilipko 2000, pl. I:2.
- 16 See Pilipko 2001, p. 339–352; Pilipko 2007, p. 256.
- 17 Dąbrowa 2008; Dąbrowa 2011, p. 258.
- 18 Curtis 2007, p. 62.
- 19 Fredricksmeyer 1997.
- 20 Neusner 1963, p. 45–48; Wolski 1990; Wolski 1977, p. 210; Vardanyan 2001; Curtis 2007.
- 21 Gaslain 2003; Huber, Hartmann 2006; Brossius 2006, p. 106–110; Lerouge 2007, p. 340–341, 344; Dąbrowa 2010, p. 126.
- 22 Bigwood 2004; Bigwood 2008; Strugnell 2008.
- 23 Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.43.1.
- 24 Vonones II and his Greek *concubine* had five sons who held the thrones of *Parthia* and Armenia: see Karras-Klapproth 1988, p. 95–96.
- 25 Minns 1915, p. 28, 31, 35; Bigwood 2008.
- 26 Bigwood 2004, p. 44–45; Bigwood 2008.
- 27 Huber, Hartman 2006: p. 486–487; Bigwood 2008.
- 28 Dio Cassius, 83.1.2.
- 29 Josephus, *Ant. Jud.* 20, 26; Gregoratti 2012.
- 30 Shayegan 2011, p. 113.
- 31 Alam 1986, nos. 1269 and 1269A.
- 32 There are also stories of warrior women and heroines such as Gurdafarid, Gurdyā and Jarira in Firdausi's *Shahnameh* that give us a picture consistent with ancient Iranian tradition.
- 33 Pilipko 2001, p. 257, 278.
- 34 Deams 2001, p. 49–50.
- 35 Kawami 1987, pl. 45.
- 36 Kawami 1987a, p. 43.
- 37 Keall, 1977; 1980; Herrmann 1977, p. 67–72.
- 38 Keall 1977, p. 5.
- 39 Keall 1980, fig. 6, 3.
- 40 Keall 1980, fig. 6, 2.
- 41 Keall 1980, figs 7, 7–8.
- 42 Keall 1980, figs 7, 2 and 5.
- 43 Winkes 1979, p. 481–484.
- 44 Chapouthier 1935, p. 13–42; Erciyas 2005, p. 134–146.
- 45 Fejfer 2008, p. 233–235.
- 46 Rostovtzeff 1936, p. 265–308, pls X–XI.
- 47 Pollard 2000, p. 55.
- 48 Keall 1980, fig. 7, 6.
- 49 Toynbee, Ward-Perkins 1950, p. 1–2, 25.
- 50 Mercklin 1962, p. 30–33, abb. 152, 91–96.
- 51 Webb 1996, p. 18.
- 52 Keall 1980, fig. 12.
- 53 Keall 1980, fig. 12, 1–2.
- 54 Keall 1980, fig. 9, 1a and b; fig. 8, 3; fig. 8, 4, fig. 10, 3; fig. 10, 6; fig. 10, 7.
- 55 Shahbazi, Friend 1993.
- 56 Pharmakovsky 1907.
- 57 Kaim 2010, p. 324, pl. 2.
- 58 Pugachenkova 1962, p. 123, fig.3.
- 59 Keall 1980, fig. 10, 1, 2 and 4.
- 60 Versnel 1970, p. 250–253.
- 61 Alföldi 1985, p. 125.
- 62 Tondrau 1953.
- 63 Lerouge 2007, p. 359; see also Curtis 2007, p. 7–25 for a revival of Iranian traditions in post-Hellenistic Iran.
- 64 Ghirshman 1956, p. 179.
- 65 Lukonin 1967, p. 183.
- 66 Von Gall 1971; Balty 2006, p. 29–44.
- 67 Callieri 2008; 2009, p. 53–55. This new interpretation was accepted by D. Huff 1993, p. 54, but L. Bier 1993, p. 58, and R. Boucharat 2006, p. 48 seem to remain undecided.
- 68 See e.g. Boyce 1996; Dhabhar 1932, p. 397.
- 69 Hultgård 2004, p. 381.
- 70 Azarnoush 1987; 1994, p. 81–88.
- 71 The size of the main room in smaller temples discovered recently in Iran does not exceed 5 × 5 m: see Moradi 2009.
- 72 *Les prairies d'or*, p. 78.
- 73 al-Mas'ūdī clearly mistook the palace of Ardashir, which lies about 5 km from the city of Ardashir Xwarrah, for a fire temple.
- 74 See Schippmann 1971, p. 142–143.
- 75 Wiesehöfer 2007, p. 61–63.
- 76 Narseh's family was captured by Galerius (Christensen 1936, p. 233) and the harem of Peroz by the Hephthalites (Tabari, I: 877).
- 77 Daryaei 2009, p. 50–52.
- 78 *Letter of Tansar*: 44; T. Daryaei 2007.
- 79 Harper 1979; for reasons of propaganda, the king depicted on Sasanian silver vessels does not lean back on the cushions of his banqueting couch but sits upright in an enthroned pose.
- 80 Garsoïan 1989, p. 146, 515; 2004.
- 81 About Khusrau Anushiravan celebrating six Gahambars, see Dhabhar 1932, p. 325.
- 82 For a Parthian banquet in a garden, see Wardrop 1914, p. 4–5.
- 83 For different types of wine see *Husraw ud Rēdak* 56–58, trans. Monchi-Zadeh, 75; Daryaei 2006; Daryaei 2009, p. 51.
- 84 Amm. Marc., 24.6.3.
- 85 Kröger 1982, p. 22–30, pls. 4–6.
- 86 Azarnoush 1994, p. 93–182.
- 87 Azarnoush 1994, p. 238.
- 88 Kröger 1982, pl. 28.

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NUMISMATICS

Quantifying Monetary Production: Ecbatana and Media in Parthian Times

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Around 148/147 BC, Parthian rulers took possession of Ecbatana, the capital of Media, until then in the hands of the Seleucid dynasty. Although there was no real upheaval, monetary practice undeniably evolved as a result of this change of ruler. The use of money became less frequent and monetary practice seems to have been lost.

This article aims to quantify monetary production in Parthian times and to study the evolution between Seleucid and Arsacid periods.

Introduction

Polybius used the most glowing terms to depict the land of Media. He stressed in turn the strategic role of the region between east and west, the vast economic resources “worthy of that of a kingdom”,¹ and the quality of livestock.²

Ancient Media seems to have occupied a unique place in the organisation of the Iranian region.³ Ecbatana, the regional centre, was successively a royal capital of the Achaemenid kings, the seat of a military command in Seleucid times, and then a royal residence under the Parthians. These statuses proceeded from its geographical position at the intersection of the various empires and kingdoms of the first millennium BC, to say nothing of its crucial legacy of a history marked by the construction of organised states, prior to the Achaemenid period.⁴

Despite this historical importance, and the fact that Hamadan must be considered one of the major sites of ancient Iran,⁵ ancient Media remains a *terra incognita*; literary and archaeological sources are far too thin to trace the history of the region, so much so that Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg

says about an earlier era, “it is not even clear what precisely should be called Media”.⁶ There are two explanations for this: first, excavations have been few⁷ but, more importantly, most of the material attributed to Ecbatana is in fact of uncertain origin and therefore cannot be used.⁸

Moreover, the available sources are quite limited. The literary sources, mainly Greek and Roman, should be viewed with caution due not only to the geographical but also to the cultural distance. Concerning the Parthian period, only Justin gives us a continuous narrative of events from the origins of the Parthians until the reign of Augustus. But we have no equivalent for the early Roman empire, so we must often content ourselves with information “*exposant, du point de vue de Rome, les exploits des armées romaines, des empereurs romains et où on ne tient compte que très rarement et de façon très sporadique des conditions socio-économiques en vigueur dans l’État des Arsacides*”.⁹

That said, there are many references to the site and the region: Ecbatana and Susa are the two Achaemenid capitals most frequently cited in the Greek and Roman sources, and are often mentioned together elsewhere.¹⁰ But, in reality, only two Greek authors evoke with any precision the splendour of ancient Ecbatana (Herodotus I, 98 and Polybius X, 27). Other references appear only as supplements; without any attempt at being comprehensive, this is partly the case for Ctesias, Berosus, Plutarch and Isidorus of Charax.

Finally, only coins and their cross-operation with other types of sources can help us detect as accurately as possible the situation in Media from the late fourth century BC to the first third of the third century AD.

Activity of the Ecbatana mint in Parthian times

The numismatic material

The corpus of Parthian coins to which we refer here consists of 5,832 coins. The following public collections have been consulted directly:¹¹ the Coin Cabinet of the Bibliothèque nationale of France (Paris); the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum (London); the Department of Coins and Medals of the Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge); the Department of Coins and Medals of the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford); the Numismatic Museum of Athens; the Coin Cabinet of Berlin (Staatliche Museum); the Coin Cabinet of Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum); the collections of the National Museum of Iran (Tehran) and the Museum of Khorramabad (Iran); and finally the American Numismatic Society (New York).

The catalogues held by the Cabinet des médailles, Paris (more than 8,000 public sales catalogues) have been systematically studied through September 2005. Only the illustrated catalogues have been taken into account.¹²

Representatives in the various collections

With regard to the Parthians, the silver denominations (overwhelmingly drachms) are most frequently included

Table 13.1. Representatives in the Parthian sample

Kings	n/O ¹ (drachms)	Kings	n/O (drachms)
<i>Mithradates I</i>	1.45	<i>Vologases I</i>	3.84
<i>Phraates II</i>	1.25	<i>Vardanes II</i>	2.75
<i>Darius</i>	1.89	<i>Pacorus II</i>	5
<i>Phraates III</i>	2.52	<i>Vologases II</i>	2.14
<i>Mithradates III</i>	3.41	<i>Artabanus III</i>	3.46
<i>Orodes II</i>	2.10	<i>Vologases III</i>	4.78
<i>Pacorus I</i>	1	<i>Osroes I</i>	16.75
<i>Phraates IV</i>	3.48	<i>Parthamaspatēs</i>	8.90
<i>Phraataces</i>	2.39	<i>Mithradates IV</i>	3.58
<i>Phr. & Musa</i>	3.96	<i>Vologases IV</i>	4.49
<i>Vonones I</i>	14.63	<i>Osroes II</i>	5.71
<i>Artabanus II</i>	4.23	<i>Vologases V</i>	3.56
<i>Vardanes I</i>	3.14	<i>Vologases VI</i>	4.81
<i>Gotarzes II</i>	7.37	<i>Artabanus IV</i>	3.31
<i>Vonones II</i>	12.73		

Table 13.2. Activity of the Ecbatana mint in Parthian times

Kings	Estimated number of original dies ¹		Estimated number of original dies per year of reign (average)	Kings	Estimated number of original dies		Estimated number of original dies per year of reign (average)
	Guilbaud	Good			Guilbaud	Good	
<i>Mithradates I</i>	7.657	8.439	0.242	<i>Vologases I</i>	13.05	12.73	0.477
<i>Phraates II</i>	2.37	2.812	0.235	<i>Vardanes II</i>	3.41	3.3	1.115
<i>Darius</i>	6.226	8.167	7.196	<i>Pacorus II</i>	14.12	12.519	0.492
<i>Phraates III</i>	5.68	5.9	0.444	<i>Vologases II</i>	2.086	2.187	0.712
<i>Mithradates III</i>	3.415	3.322	1.122	<i>Artabanus III</i>	4.278	4.239	0.425
<i>Orodes II</i>	43.58	46.47	2.269	<i>Vologases III</i>	23.047	21.02	0.524
<i>Pacorus I</i>	?	?	?	<i>Osroes I</i>	2.482	1	0.087
<i>Phraates IV</i>	30.67	29.877	0.84	<i>Parthamaspatēs</i>	8.873	5.702	7.287
<i>Phraataces</i>	6.74	6.452	1.649	<i>Mithradates IV</i>	16.63	16.48	1.505
<i>Phr. & Musa</i>	7.86	7.522	3.845	<i>Vologases IV</i>	13.039	14.45	0.312
<i>Vonones I</i>	6.133	2.782	1.114	<i>Osroes II</i>	10.878	11.3	11.089
<i>Artabanus II</i>	16.28	15.36	0.564	<i>Vologases V</i>	9.381	8.627	0.529
<i>Vardanes I</i>	9.39	9.972	1.382	<i>Vologases VI</i>	18.64	16.66	0.882
<i>Gotarzes II</i>	10.38	7.68	0.82	<i>Artabanus IV</i>	6.257	6.922	0.823
<i>Vonones II</i>	9.594	4.809	7.201				

¹ W.W. Esty, "Estimation of the Size of a Coinage: a Survey and Comparison of Methods", NC 146, 1986, p. 185–215.

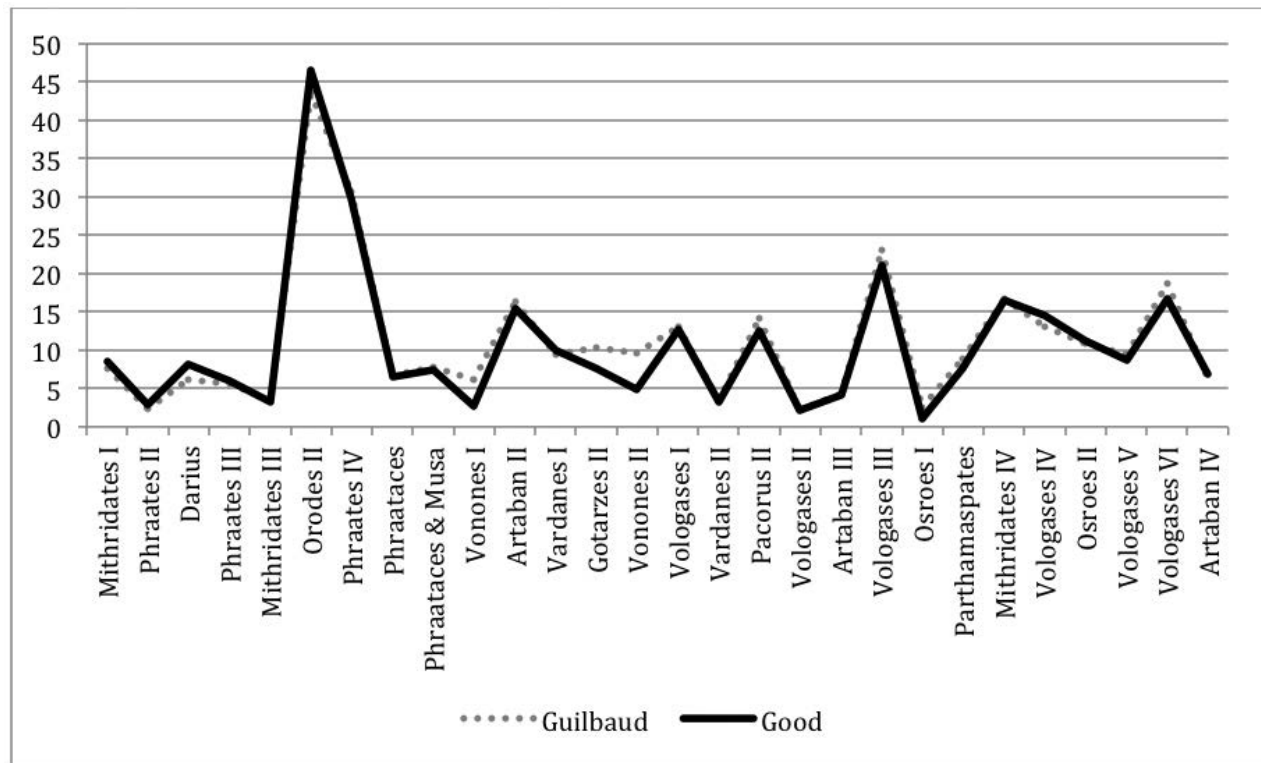


Figure 13.1: Estimated number of original dies (equivalent tetradrachms).

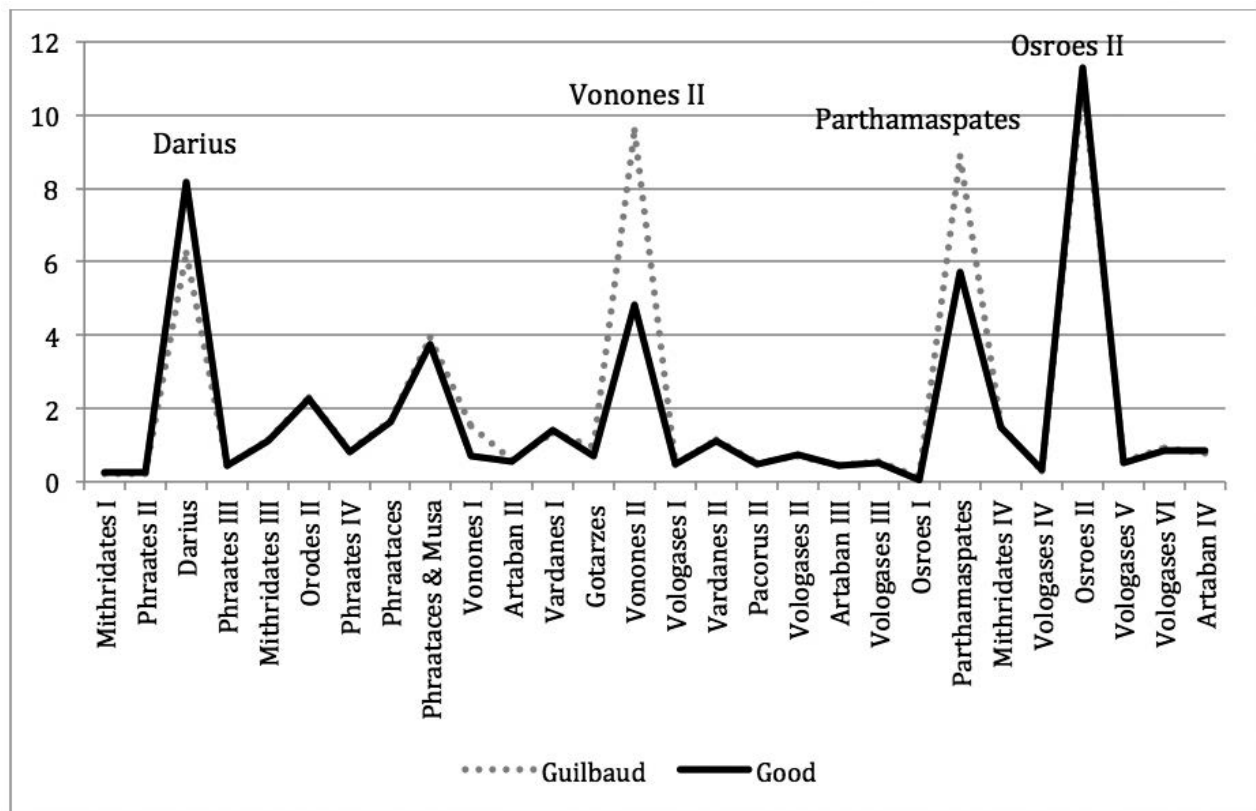


Figure 13.2: Estimated number of original dies per year of reign (equivalent tetradrachms – average).

in the sales catalogues, while the bronzes are mostly or exclusively represented in the cabinets. Parthian bronzes, usually of poor quality, have a negligible impact. The collections in Paris, Berlin and Vienna are in this respect very well represented, more so than the Seleucids.

When reading the tables and figures above, two observations are obvious:

- First, Orodes II is the Arsacid king who struck the most coins, with the equivalent of about forty dies for tetradrachms throughout his reign.
- Second, if one focuses on the study of the number of dies used by regnal year, we see that the rulers or usurpers who reigned only one year, or at least for only a short time, stand out quite significantly, since their annual average emissions are about eight or nine times higher than for other kings.

A decline in the use of money in Media

Nothing indicates that the urban network of Media or the nature of trade in the region had changed dramatically compared to what it had been under the Seleucids. However,

the use of money seems to be reduced in the Arsacid period. Indeed, while in Media the Seleucids (between 311 and 148 BC) used an average of 1.17 tetradrachm dies per year, the Parthians between 148 BC and 222 AD did not use more than 0.80. The findings are similar if one studies coinages issued in peacetime: 0.58 tetradrachm dies were necessary to supply market money under Seleucus IV, while 0.44 was sufficient under Phraates III.¹³

However, the population of ancient Media is estimated between 1 and 1.25 million people¹⁴ and we therefore arrive at a ratio of 0.4496 to 0.608 tetradrachm dies per year per million inhabitants. At the same time, the data show double the dies for Mesopotamia (1 die per year per million inhabitants¹⁵). Keep in mind that ancient Media is defined by a macro- or even monocephalic system: the urban network was not very dense, and therefore the need for coins small.¹⁶

Parthian bronze coinage and the minting of drachms in Ecbatana

Until the reign of Vardanes I (40–47 AD), the Parthian kings regularly minted bronze, principally in either two denominations (chalkous and dichalkous) or four

Table 13.3: Percentage of use of metals (mint of Ecbatana)

Kings	AR	AE	Kings	AR	AE
<i>Mithradates I</i>	45.16%	54.84%	<i>Vologases I</i>	86.5%	13.5%
<i>Phraates II</i>	45.45%	54.55%	<i>Vardanes II</i>	100%	-
<i>Darius</i>	80%	20%	<i>Pacorus II</i>	100%	-
<i>Phraates III</i>	42.24%	57.76%	<i>Vologases II</i>	100%	-
<i>Mithradates III</i>	97.61%	2.39%	<i>Artabanus III</i>	100%	-
<i>Orodes II</i>	31.14%	68.86%	<i>Vologases III</i>	100%	-
<i>Pacorus I</i>	10%	90%	<i>Osroes I</i>	100%	-
<i>Phraates IV</i>	40.82%	59.18%	<i>Parthamaspates</i>	100%	-
<i>Phraataces</i>	72%	28%	<i>Mithradates IV</i>	98.57	1.43%
<i>Phr. & Musa</i>	96.11%	3.89%	<i>Vologases IV</i>	100%	-
<i>Vonones I</i>	71.875%	28.125%	<i>Osroes II</i>	100%	-
<i>Artabanus II</i>	67.14%	32.86%	<i>Vologases V</i>	100%	-
<i>Vardanes I</i>	100%	-	<i>Vologases VI</i>	100%	-
<i>Gotarzes II</i>	100%	-	<i>Artabanus IV</i>	100%	-
<i>Vonones II</i>	100%	-			

Table 13.4: Percentage of use of metals (mints of Ecbatana and Seleucia on the Tigris from Mithradates I to Artabanus IV)

	Tetradrachms		Drachms		AE	
	Ecbatana	Seleucia	Ecbatana	Seleucia	Ecbatana	Seleucia
c. 148 BC – c. 226 AD	0%	60%	93%	6%	7%	34%
until Vardanes I	0%	93.93%	82%	0%	18%	6.07%
from Vardanes I	0%	61.49%	97.94%	9.62%	2.06%	28.89%

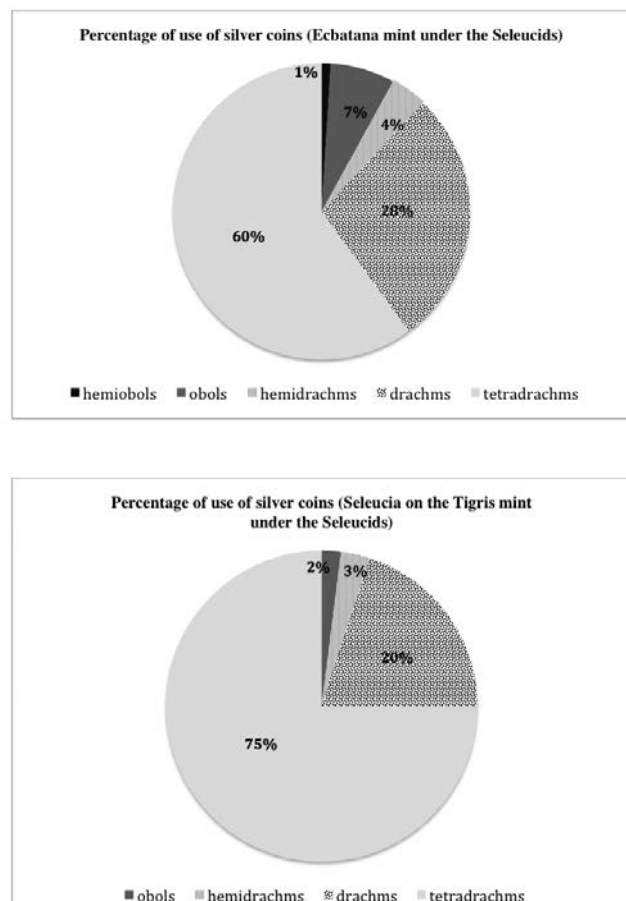


Figure 13.3: Percentage of use of silver coins.

denominations (the same plus the tetrachalkous and octochalkous under Mithradates I). Then from the middle of the first century AD, bronze strikes suddenly disappear, apart from a few rare exceptions. Thus, two major periods are needed to differentiate Parthian monetary practice in Media: until about 38–40 AD, the mint is diverse and denominations of low value are common, while later on monometallism based on the drachm becomes the almost exclusive practice.

The comparison with the coinage of Seleucia on the Tigris is illuminating in this regard.

The Parthians thus modified the monetary practice that the Seleucids had introduced into Media: while the Greek sovereigns widely struck tetradrachms, their Parthian successors, in the mint of Ecbatana at least, ceased their production.¹⁷

Moreover, with the advent of Vardanes I the workshop of Ecbatana specialised in striking drachms. This is new: indeed, the Seleucids struck most of their metal in the form of tetradrachms (60% of emissions¹⁸) and the Parthian predecessors of Vardanes struck nearly 20% in bronze coins. Perhaps the facts will help us understand the situation at the mint of Seleucia on the Tigris: while emissions of bronze nearly ceased at Ecbatana with Vardanes I (2% of total

production), the workshop at Seleucia in the same time period dramatically increased the striking of bronze (29% of the monetary production, versus approximately 6% from Mithradates I to Vardanes I).

The workshops of Ecbatana and Seleucia on the Tigris thus appear to have issued two coinages complementary to each other, so should we infer a reorganisation of the satrapies inherited from Seleucids? The question is worth asking; indeed, since the Greek era, each royal residence struck various emissions to provide for all requirements, whether daily needs (small denominations and bronze) or high intrinsic value (drachms and tetradrachms to finance military campaigns). After the reign of Vardanes I, Ecbatana exclusively issued drachms, while Seleucia's priority was to issue tetradrachms and bronzes. This would seem to suggest a monetary area larger than the strict boundaries of each satrapy. Nothing really can completely confirm this hypothesis, but the circulation of money is a strong indicator; the data on the Parthians in this area remain very thin and are therefore difficult to interpret.

Chronic political instability

Parthian kings regularly faced revolts, conspiracies or external threats. The history of the dynasty is marked by parricide and fratricide. The question is whether this instability might explain the volume of some strikes under a few of the kings.

The singular case of Orodes II is interesting: after killing his father Phraates III with the help of his brother Mithradates III, Orodes turned against his brother when he (Orodes) occupied Babylon and Seleucia on the Tigris. Subsequently, in 53 BC, he faced the threat of the triumvir Crassus, who was then defeated by the Parthian general Surena at the battle of Carrhae. Does this succession of events explain why Orodes II used about 2.3 dies per year of his reign, compared to Mithradates III who used about 1.1, and Mithradates IV who used 1.5?

One last element may finally support this idea of war coinage: the contemporaneity of the various series that emerges from the die-links analysis would fit with the idea that some of the series were produced in a short time to answer special needs.

Die-Links

The Parthian drachms die-links chart (see Appendix) shows a strike density even more intense than it was for the connections of Seleucid tetradrachms. Obverses are almost always associated with many reverses, which are themselves coupled to many other obverses. This finding is somewhat surprising, since we have just seen that Media was a region much less monetised under the Parthians than under the Seleucids. The technical study of the coinage of Osroes II can enlighten us in this regard. This coinage

offers one of the most revealing examples of the density of the Parthian strikes; that of Vologases VI has the same characteristics.

Osroes II in about 190 AD struck (simultaneously?) drachms using about thirty dies. Such an issue is truly amazing. A decline in the quality of the dies can be seen, which would suggest that it was necessary to use many more dies. It is quite clear that the coins minted are of poor quality:¹⁹

1. Double strikes are much more common than for other kings (New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1944.100.83558²⁰).
2. Strikes irregularly dispersed the metal on the surface of the flan (for example, New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n°1944.100.83558).
3. The metal used for the flans is poor; oxidation (unusually common on these silver coins) is almost the rule (Vienna, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 12, n°23160,²¹ n° 23161;²² London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n°1894,0506.2289,²³ n°1900,0101.23;²⁴ also New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n°1923.150.408²⁵ and especially n°1973.56.1718²⁶).
4. Coins show frequent die cracks, a surprising finding for a brief period of use, as for Osroes: for example Vienna, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 12, n°23163,²⁷

n°23162;²⁸ London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n°1930,0812,69,²⁹ n°1877,1202.1;³⁰ or finally Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n°18408, and 4/10,³¹ n°18410, 5/2.³²

If the technical assumption is correct, fewer coins than usual were produced from each die. However, the coin characteroscopy for drachms of Osroes II is rather high (5.71). Nevertheless, more than 40% of dies are represented by a single surviving coin, the high characteroscopic index being obtained through some dies being especially well represented.³³ The technical criteria may partly explain the high number of dies found for Osroes II, but it apparently cannot be extended to explain the emissions, almost all also consistent, of Darius and of Vonones II or even Parthamaspatas. The quality of their coinage does not specifically differ from other contemporary Parthian kings; characteroscopic indices relating to their coinages are high, while the number of dies represented by a single specimen is rather low compared to other Parthian rulers.³⁴

The rhythm of multiple pairs of dies could then, in this case, be explained in two ways:

1. First, the rulers were faced with external pressures that forced them to strike drachms from between 30 and 40 dies almost simultaneously. Coin production appears to have been characterized by the greatest inconsistency³⁵ as shown elsewhere by the die-links of Osroes II.³⁶

Table 13.5: The most populous weight

<i>Kings</i>	<i>The most populous weight</i>	<i>Kings</i>	<i>The most populous weight</i>
<i>Mithradates I</i>	3.75–3.79g and 3.80–3.84g (28.57% each)	<i>Vologases I</i>	3.65–3.69g (12.25%)
<i>Darius</i>	4.05–4.09g (23.33%)	<i>Vardanes II</i>	3.70–3.74g (20%)
<i>Phraates III</i>	4.05–4.09g (21.73%)	<i>Pacorus II</i>	3.65–3.69g (16.17%)
<i>Mithradates III</i>	4.05–4.09g (36.11%)	<i>Vologases II</i>	3.60–3.64g (30.76%)
<i>Orodes II</i>	3.75–3.79g (10.80%)	<i>Artabanus III</i>	3.75–3.79g (23.404%)
<i>Pacorus I</i>	A single example: 3.86g	<i>Vologases III</i>	3.75–3.79g (19.55%)
<i>Phraates IV</i>	3.80–3.84g (12.093%)	<i>Osroes I</i>	3.70–3.74g and 3.80–3.84g (13.33% each)
<i>Phraataces</i>	3.70–3.74g (18.51%)	<i>Parthamaspatas</i>	3.75–3.79g (28.97%)
<i>Phr. & Musa</i>	3.65–3.69g and 3.70–3.74g (14.14% each)	<i>Mithradates IV</i>	3.70–3.74g (16.16%)
<i>Vonones I</i>	3.85–3.89 (19.28%)	<i>Vologases IV</i>	3.65–3.69g and 3.70–3.74g (13.87%)
<i>Artabanus II</i>	3.70–3.74g and 3.80–3.84g (13.42% each)	<i>Osroes II</i>	3.65–3.69g (15.78%)
<i>Vardanes I</i>	3.70–3.74g (18%)	<i>Vologases V</i>	3.70–3.74g (14.28%)
<i>Gotarzes II</i>	3.60–3.64g (11.41%)	<i>Vologases VI</i>	3.60–3.64g (15.84%)
<i>Vonones II</i>	3.70–3.74g (17.53%)	<i>Artabanus IV</i>	3.65–3.69g (24.28%)

Table 13.6: Theoretical weight of Parthian drachms

Kings	Theoretical weight	Kings	Theoretical weight
Mithradates I	3.82–3.87g	Vologases I	3.64–3.66g
Darius	4.06–4.08g	Vardanes II	3.73–3.75g
Phraates III	4.01–4.03g	Pacorus II	3.65–3.67g
Mithradates III	4.11–4.13g	Vologases II	3.65–3.67g
Orodes II	3.85–3.87g	Artabanus III	3.80–3.82g
Pacorus I	A single example: 3.86g (3.90–3.92g)	Vologases III	3.73–3.75g
Phraates IV	3.83–3.85g	Osroes I	3.69–3.71g
Phraataces	3.76–3.78g	Parthamaspatēs	3.79–3.81g
Phr. & Musa	3.75–3.77g	Mithradates IV	3.69–3.71g
Vonones I	3.85–3.87g	Vologases IV	3.69–3.71g
Artabanus II	3.75–3.77g	Osroes II	3.66–3.68g
Vardanes I	3.71–3.73g	Vologases V	3.71–3.73g
Gotarzes II	3.64–3.66g	Vologases VI	3.66–3.68g
Vonones II	3.71–3.73g	Artabanus IV	3.71–3.73g

2. The second hypothesis: having reigned only a short time, the kings began issuing their own coins massively and rapidly to legitimize their rule in a period of rebellion against the ruling regime;³⁷ the usurpers would then have chosen to monetise silver in large amounts (unrelated to their needs) rather than bronze. Was this with the help of Rome? A metallurgical analysis of coins in this regard would be of interest to know the origin of the metal.

Putting obverse dies into service under the Parthians

Striking coins with about thirty obverse dies simultaneously (or almost so) is somewhat surprising, since it presupposes also the commissioning of several of these synchronous obverse dies simultaneously rather than as required. The finding remains unexplained: “cette idée [la mise en service simultanée de plusieurs coins de droit] soulève une réticence naturelle. C’est que, quoiqu’il faille se méfier de l’anachronisme, on a un certain mal à imaginer un responsable de la production donnant l’ordre de graver en série un nombre important de coins de droit, avant même de savoir si ceux-ci seront nécessaires...”³⁸ Maybe we should explain this phenomenon by the poor quality of the dies requiring the use of a large number.

Another explanation could be a technical issue proposed by J. Bingen³⁹ and G. Le Rider:⁴⁰ several contiguous obverse dies were engraved on the same anvil, thereby facilitating their simultaneous use. This explanation does not seem to be supported by the evidence: “aucun bout de gravure appartenant à un autre coin”⁴¹ could be distinguished on the obverse.

Maybe in the final analysis, if the technical criteria do not appear to be supported, we should see the die usage as offering evidence of the unstable political context of the time, that required the new ruler to issue a substantial coinage early in his reign in an attempt to prevent the sort of the troubles that were likely to arise under such uncertain circumstances.

Observations on the weight of Parthian coins

The coinage of Mithradates I faithfully follows that of his Seleucid predecessor Alexander I Balas. The magistrate AOY Φ remained in office (see below) and the technical aspects of striking remain unchanged. The weights confirm this view. Alexander Balas had struck drachms of very light weight, far from the Attic or Euboeo-Attic standards. The median weight of the last Seleucid drachms from the workshop of Ecbatana is 3.88g.⁴² The median weight of the first Parthian drachms is about 3.78g.⁴³ This is a significant difference, but the drachms are still light. Conversely, from the reign of Darius until the end of that of Mithradates III, the weights are aligned on much higher bases, since the theoretical modal weight of drachms for a 24-year period (c. 70–c. 54 BC) is about 4.06g to 4.08g, or about 6.30% heavier than under Mithradates I. But, presumably as with Orodes II, and permanently under Pacorus I, the weight fluctuates again to return to the standard employed in the late Seleucid and early Parthian periods, and finally staggers, with some exceptions, to between 3.65g and 3.75g. We certainly should not see in this any reform but rather trial and error in monetary practice.

The essential point is that, as with the axis (12h on all coins, with some errors at 11h and 1h), Parthian coins are characterised by a stable weight for more than three centuries.

Bronze

The first Parthian bronze coins issued at Ecbatana also follow the reforms introduced by Alexander I Balas. Indeed, chalkous, dichalkous and tetrachalkous are given the same marks of value as under Alexander Balas, applied to coins of almost identical weight. No changes occur, other than a continuous shift of the weight; however, the slow and steady evolution in weight cannot allow us to imagine a monetary reform.

Notes on control marks

Control marks give rise to some comments. Monograms used by Molon in the Seleucid period shed light for us on his policy. He rebelled against royal power, but maintained the magistrate in charge (or one of the magistrates) at the workshop of Ecbatana. In turn, Antiochus III subsequently confirmed that same magistrate in office. This is similar to the case found at the end of the Seleucid and the beginning of the Parthian dynasty: the magistrate AOY  who was responsible for the mint under Alexander I Balas continued his supervisory work at the workshop of Ecbatana during the reign of Mithradates I. The case is interesting because the other mint officer seems to have departed for the monetary workshop of Seleucia on the Tigris.

The invasion of Media and the capture of Ecbatana by the Parthians could indeed mark a break in the tenure of the monetary magistrates. G. Le Rider dates the Seleucids' loss of the capital of Media to 148 or 147 BC.⁴⁴ A magistrate with the monogram  remains in place. However, another control mark, , attested during the reign of Alexander I Balas, now disappeared from the workshop. A link can possibly be established with Seleucia on the Tigris, where the monogram  appears on coins issued between 150 and 145 BC⁴⁵ (for which we could propose a new dating between 148/7 and 145 BC to reflect the assumed transfer of the magistrate). Moreover, it is when Ecbatana passed under Parthian control that Seleucia started to issue drachms, which it had not struck since the reign of Seleucus II.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the hypothesis cannot be confirmed as a definitive conclusion for two reasons:

1. First, while links between the workshops at Seleucia on the Tigris and Ecbatana can be identified, no other source corroborates the hypothesis of the transfer of a magistrate after the fall of Ecbatana.
2. More importantly, the monogram in question is so simple that it may have been used simultaneously by many magistrates in many workshops of the empire.

Much work lies ahead before we can trace with certainty the monetary history of the Parthians.

Notes

- 1 Polybius V, 44–45. See also Briant 1966, p. 758.
- 2 Polybius X, 27.
- 3 Boucharlat 1990, p. 149.
- 4 Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988, p. 197–212.
- 5 Brown 1998.
- 6 Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988, p. 203.
- 7 Sarraf 1997; Knapton, Sarraf and Curtis 2001.
- 8 Muscarella 1980.
- 9 Wolski 1980.
- 10 Weissbach 1905.
- 11 Boillet 2009.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Boillet 2009.
- 14 Aperghis 2004, p. 240
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Aperghis, *id.*, p. 240: “One may also consider Ekbatana, serving Media, with an output of half a die per year on average. In terms of population, Seleukid Media should have possessed about a quarter of Mesopotamia’s population and one would have expected roughly one die per year at Ekbatana. The smaller number, if not a statistical error, might simply be an indication of the lesser need for coinage in a region not so heavily urbanized, where much payment, taxation and exchange were still being conducted in kind.”
- 17 McDowell 1935.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Comparison of the monetary emissions of Vologases IV and Vologases V is illuminating in this regard.
- 20 A21-P1.
- 21 A1-P1.
- 22 A37-P10.
- 23 A23-P30.
- 24 A21-P2
- 25 A21-P2
- 26 A19-P1
- 27 A12-P24
- 28 A4-P5.
- 29 A21-P18.
- 30 A4-P11.
- 31 A1-P1
- 32 A21-P1
- 33 Especially dies A1, A3, A4, A5, A6, A9, A10, A14, A19 and A21, all represented by more than ten specimens.
- 34 Except for Darius.
- 35 This inconsistency is characterised by die axes or by the unusually poor quality of the strikes, as is the case for the coins of Osroes: orientations are still 12h, but less well adjusted, with significant alignments to 11h or 1h.
- 36 Appendix 1.
- 37 This is the case with Osroes II against Vologases IV, and then during the armed conflict that pitted him against Vologases V.
- 38 Callataÿ 1999.
- 39 Bingen 1969, p. 16.
- 40 Le Rider 1977, p. 419–420.
- 41 Callataÿ 1999, p. 93.

- 42 That is a theoretical weight of 3.92–3.94g. See Boillet 2009.
 43 That is a theoretical weight of 3.82–3.84g.
 44 Le Rider 1965, p. 339–340.
 45 Houghton and Lorber 2008, p. 249.
 46 *Ibid.*

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Appendix

The drachm die-links of Osroes II

c. 190 AD

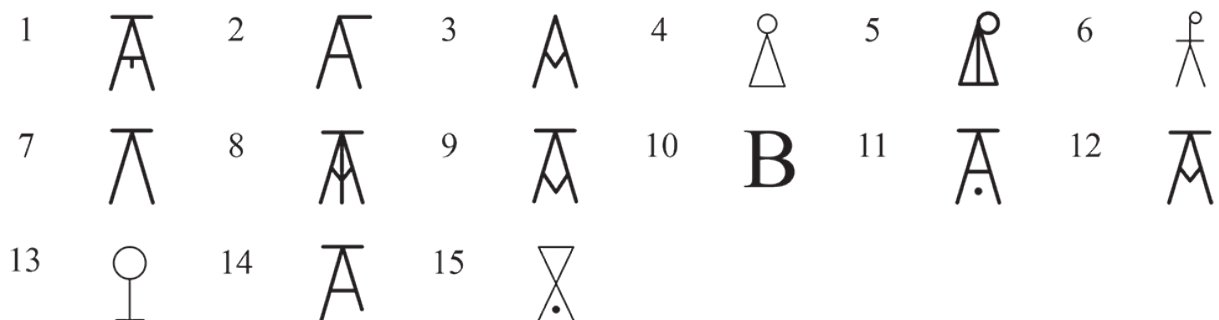
Osroes II is known to us only by his coins; the magnitude of his mintage takes us by surprise. His coins are very similar to those of his predecessor, Vologases IV; differences relate only to details such as tiara and beard, as well as some variants of letters on the reverse.

Osroes II struck coins only at Ecbatana. This suggests that he controlled only the region of Media during his short reign.

Characteroscopic index

Denominations	n	d	n/d
Drachms	240	42	5.71

Monograms, letters and symbols on Parthian coins (reverse)



Series I

Obverse: Bust left, long beard, wearing tiara.

Reverse: Archer seated right. In the field, variant letters (A). Around the king, in two lines: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΥ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ [ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ].
The Greek of the legend is too corrupt to make sense.

Group 1: No pellet over the bow on the reverse

References: Sellwood, *Coinage of Parthia*, 85/1 & 3.

Letter A (14)

Note: The legends are unreadable.

1. A1¹-P1(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1900,0706.118. 3.53g, 18ø, 12h.
2. A1¹-P2(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1930,0812.67. 3.67g, 19ø, 12h.
3. A1¹-P3(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1894,0506.2285. 3.80g, 18ø, 12h.
4. A1¹-P4(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1889,0105.1582. 3.74g, 18ø, 12h.
5. A2¹-P5(a) Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, n.c. 3.83g, 19ø, 12h.
6. A3¹-P5(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 258/1882, 4/7. 3.11g, 19ø, 12h.
7. A3¹-P5(b) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1894,0506.2287. 3.80g, 19ø, 12h.
8. A3¹-P6(a) Jacques et Pierre Stivin, November 1987, n° 38. ?g, 27ø, 12h.
9. A3¹-P6(b) Albrecht-Hoffmann, June 1984, n° 118. ?g, 19ø, ?h.
10. A3¹-P7¹²(a) Peus 349, 30 October - 1st November 1996, n° 221. 3.48g, 20ø, ?h.
11. A3¹-P8(a) Hirsch 220, 21–22 February 2002, n° 1487. 3.84g, 19ø, ?h.
12. A3¹-P8(b) Hirsch 231, 26–28 November 2003, n° 460. 3.83g, 19ø, ?h.
13. A3¹-P9(a) Ritter, November 1998, n° 451 = Ritter, December 1997, n° 430. ?g, 19ø, ?h.
14. A3¹-P10(a) Künker 23, 30 September - 1st October 1992, n° 158. 3.39g, 18ø, ?h.
15. A3¹-P10(b) Rauch, 24–25 February 1977, n° 21. ?g, 18ø, ?h.
16. A4¹-P5(a) Vienna, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 12, n° 23162. 3.725g, 19ø, 12h.
17. A4¹-P5(b) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Imhoof-Blumer collection, Cabinet 14/58, n° 4/3. 3.78g, 19ø, 12h.
18. A4¹-P6(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Guthrie collection, Cabinet 14/58, n° 5/9. 3.45g, 18ø, 12h.
19. A4¹-P11(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1877,1202.1. 3.26g, 19ø, 12h.
20. A4¹-P11(b) Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, n.c. 1308. 3.55g, 21ø, 12h.
21. A4¹-P11(c) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1894,0506.2286. 3.61g, 20ø, 12h.
22. A4¹-P11(d) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1889,0105.1583. 3.57g, 20ø, 12h.
23. A4¹-P11(e) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 10. 3.67g, 19ø, 12h.
24. A4¹-P12(a) Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, n.c. 3.53g, 18ø, 12h.
25. A4¹-P13(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Löffbecke collection, Cabinet 14/58, n° 4/6. 3.64g, 18ø, 12h.
26. A5¹-P6(a) Sternberg, 16–17 November 1978, n° 342. 3.62g, 18ø, ?h.
27. A5¹-P7(a) Schenk-Behrens, 13–15 June 1996, n° 235. 3.58g, 19ø, ?h.
28. A5¹-P7(b) Schulman, 27–29 March 1890, n° 475. 3.43g, 18ø, ?h.
29. A5¹-P14(a) Elsen, List 202, January - February 1999, n° 165. 3.89g, 19ø, ?h.
30. A6¹-P6(a) Schulman, 22–24 October 1985, n° 191. 3.22g, 17ø, ?h.
31. A6¹-P14(a) Peus 333, 6–11 May 1992, n° 461. 3.39g, 18ø, ?h.
32. A6¹-P15(a) Elsen, List 190, April 1997, n° 59. 3.74g, 20ø, ?h.
33. A6¹-P16(a) Emporium Hamburg, 18–19 May 1994, n° 115. 3.70g, 17ø, ?h.
34. A6¹-P17(a) Schulman, 8–9 November 1982, n° 60. 3.29g, 18ø, ?h.
35. A7¹-P6(a) CGF, 18 June 2004, n° 74. 3.69g, 17ø, ?h.
36. A7¹-P14(a) Elsen, List 196, December 1997 - January 1998, n° 46. 3.50g, 20ø, ?h.
37. A7¹-P17(a) Rauch, 16–19 January 1984, n° 346. ?g, 18ø, ?h.
38. A7¹-P18(a) Jean-Marie Defranoux, 29 June 1985, n° 157. 3.55g, 19ø, ?h.
39. A7¹-P19(a) Peus 324, 5–7 April 1989, n° 315. 3.51g, 20ø, ?h.
40. A8¹-P6(a) Hirsch 178, 12–14 May 1993, n° 525. 3.42g, 18ø, ?h.
41. A8¹-P14(a) Gadoury, 3–5 October 1982, n° 441. 3.64g, 20ø, ?h.
42. A8¹-P20(a) Hirsch 185, 15–18 February 1995, n° 501. 3.58g, 18ø, ?h.
43. A9¹-P6(a) CGF, 31 December 2002, n° 121. 3.69g, 20ø, 12h.
44. A9¹-P6(b) Rauch, 8–9 November 1974, n° 32. ?g, 19ø, ?h.
45. A9¹-P9(a) Peus 309, 2–4 May 1984, n° 90. 3.23g, 19ø, ?h.
46. A9¹-P19(a) Peus 303, 20–22 October 1981, n° 210. 3.04g, 19ø, ?h.
47. A9¹-P21(a) Freeman & Sear, 14 January 1998, n° 215. 3.88g, 20ø, ?h.
48. A9¹-P22(a) Schenk-Behrens, 23–24 May 2002, n° 139. 3.58g, 21ø, ?h.
49. A9¹-P23(a) Schulman, 19–21 March 1986, n° 196. 3.34g, 19ø, ?h.
50. A10¹-P7(a) SKAZ, Autumn 1991, n° 131 = SKAZ, Spring 1987, n° 57. 3.63g, 19ø, ?h.
51. A11¹-P7(a) Peus 363, 26 April 2000, n° 5197. 3.69g, 18ø, ?h.
52. A12¹-P7¹²(a) SKAZ, Spring 1986, n° 65. 3.63g, 18ø, ?h.
53. A12¹-P14(a) Spink Taisei Zürich 49, 27–28 October 1993, n° 23. 3.65g, 19ø, ?h.
54. A12¹-P24(a) Vienna, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 12, n° 23163. 3.79g, 19ø, 12h.
55. A13¹-P7(a) Malloy, 23 March 2000, n° 173. ?g, 18ø, ?h.
56. A13¹-P24(a) Elsen, List 193, September 1997, n° 101. 3.66g, 17ø, ?h.
57. A14¹-P7(a) Peus 303, 20–22 October 1981, n° 211. 3.53g, 20ø, ?h.
58. A14¹-P9(a) Schulman, 20–21 October 1988, n° 506. 3.74g, 21ø, ?h.
59. A14¹-P19(a) Davissons Ltd, 18 November 1994, n° 113. 3.70g, 20ø, ?h.

60. A14¹-P25(a) Hirsch 182, 4–6 May 1994, n° 439. 3.60g, 19ø, ?h.
61. A15¹-P8¹(a) Albrecht-Hoffmann 73, 22–24 April 1992, n° 392. 3.57g, 19ø, ?h.
62. A15¹-P9¹(a) G. Henzen, 159, May 2005, n° 243. 3.74g, 19ø, ?h.
63. A15¹-P11¹(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 10195, 4/9. 3.59g, 20ø, 12h.
64. A16¹-P9¹(a) Gorny & Mosch 126, October 2003, n° 1468. 3.16g, 20ø, ?h.
65. A16¹-P9¹(b) CNG 14, 20 March 1991, n° 225. 3.35g, 17ø, ?h.
66. A17¹-P9¹(a) Giessener Münzhandlung Dieter Gorny 79, 11 October 1996, n° 310. 3.92g, 22ø, ?h.
67. A17¹-P15¹(a) Harlan J. Berk, 22 July 2003, n° 167. 3.47g, 18ø, ?h.
68. A17¹-P17¹(a) Kovacs, 18 May 1990, n° 194. 3.47g, 19ø, ?h.
69. A17¹-P26(a) Lanz 5, 1 December 1975, n° 275. 3.73g, 20ø, ?h.
70. A18-P9¹(a) Hirsch 176, 19–20 November 1992, n° 417. 3.61g, 20ø, ?h.
71. A19¹-P11¹(a) Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, n° H3351. 3.65g, 20ø, 12h.
72. A19¹-P27(a) Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, n.c. 3.63g, 20ø, 12h.
73. A19¹-P28(a) Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, n.c. 3.50g, 18ø, 12h.
74. A20¹-P11¹(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1894,0506.2283. 3.34g, 19ø, 12h.
75. A21¹-P11¹(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, cat. 1. 3.62g, 20ø, 12h.
76. A21¹-P29(a) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1973.56.1717. 3.05g, 21ø, 12h.
77. A22¹-P15¹(a) Freeman & Sear, 10 March 1995, n° 248. 3.50g, 19ø, ?h.
78. A23¹-P30(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1894,0506.2289. 3.40g, 17ø, 12h.
79. A24-P31(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1894,0506.2284. 3.57g, 20ø, 12h.
80. A25-P32(a) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1977.158.808. 3.50g, 22ø, 12h.
81. A26¹-P33(a) Schenk-Behrens, 23–24 May 2002, n° 138. 3.74g, 19ø, ?h.
82. A26¹-P34(a) Albrecht-Hoffmann 72, 2–4 December 1991, n° 940. ?g, 19ø, ?h.
83. A27-P35(a) Albrecht-Hoffmann 50, 23–25 November 1983, n° 238. 3.55g, 17ø, ?h.
84. A28¹-P17¹(a) Künker 21, 16–18 March 1992, n° 352. 3.38g, 20ø, ?h.
85. A28¹-P36(a) CNG 39, 18 September 1996, n° 822. 3.41g, 19ø, ?h.
86. A29¹-P37¹(a) Emporium Hamburg, 17–18 May 2001, n° 149. ?g, 19ø, ?h.
87. A1¹-P1¹(a) Vienna, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 12, n° 23160. ?g, 18ø, 12h.
88. A1¹-P1¹(b) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 18408, 4/10. 3.80g, 18ø, 12h.
89. A1¹-P2¹(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Löbbecke collection, Cabinet 14/58, n° 4/5. 3.24g, 17ø, 12h.
90. A1¹-P3¹(a) Numismatica Wien, 22–23 June 1977, n° 129. 3.23g, 18ø, ?h.
91. A1¹-P3¹(b) Schulman, 19–21 March 1986, n° 195. 3.66g, 18ø, ?h.
92. A1¹-P3¹(c) Rauch, 5 November 2001, n° 153. 3.64g, 17ø, 12h.
93. A1¹-P3¹(d) Peus 338, 27–29 April 1994, n° 240. 3.72g, 18ø, ?h.
94. A1¹-P3¹(e) Numismatica Wien, 22–23 June 1977, n° 130. 3.35g, 19ø, ?h.
95. A1¹-P3¹(f) Numismatic Fine Arts, 18 December 1987, n° 489. 3.72g, 16ø, ?h.
96. A1¹-P3¹(g) Elsen, List 191, May–June 1997, n° 113. 3.61g, 18ø, ?h.
97. A1¹-P4¹(a) Rauch, 24–25 February 1977, n° 20. ?g, 16ø, ?h.
98. A1¹-P5¹(a) Peus 345, 1–3 November 1995, n° 263. 3.78g, 18ø, ?h.
99. A1¹-P5¹(b) Numismatic Fine Arts, 20 October 1978, n° 104. ?g, 16ø, ?h.
100. A1¹-P6¹(a) Schulman, 19–21 April 1989, n° 215 = Schulman, 11–12 April 1988, n° 260. 3.35g, 18ø, ?h.
101. A1¹-P7¹(a) Numismatica Wien, 20–21 November 1975, n° 148. 3.51g, 18ø, 6h.
102. A4¹-P8(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 18409, 5/1. 3.53g, 19ø, 12h.
103. A4¹-P9(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 5/6. 3.49g, 20ø, 12h.
104. A5¹-P1¹(a) CGF, 31 December 2002, n° 122. 3.69g, 20ø, 12h.
105. A5¹-P1¹(b) Elsen, 14 November 1984, n° 66. 3.71g, 17ø, ?h.
106. A5¹-P1¹(c) Albrecht-Hoffmann 74, 11–13 November 1992, n° 477. 3.66g, 18ø, ?h.
107. A5¹-P1¹(d) CNG 12, 26 September 1990, n° 532. 3.70g, 16ø, ?h.
108. A5¹-P1¹(e) Numismatica Wien, March 1975, n° 39. ?g, 18ø, ?h.
109. A5¹-P1¹(f) CNG 45, 18 March 1998, n° 678. 3.74g, 19ø, ?h.
110. A5¹-P1¹(g) Albrecht-Hoffmann 59, 29–31 October 1986, n° 1274. 3.66g, 18ø, ?h.
111. A5¹²-P1¹(h) CNG 10, 21 March 1990, n° 162. 3.27g, 21ø, ?h.
112. A5¹-P1¹(i) Albrecht-Hoffmann 39, 16–17 April 1980, n° 715. 3.57g, 20ø, ?h.
113. A5¹-P1¹(j) Numismatica Wien, March 1975, n° 38. ?g, 18ø, ?h.
114. A5¹-P10¹(a) Peus 326, 1–3 November 1989, n° 410. 3.71g, 19ø, ?h.
115. A5¹-P10¹(b) Dorotheum, 3–5 May 1981, n° 54. ?g, 18ø, ?h.
116. A5¹-P11¹(a) Rauch, 7–8 June 1977, n° 97. ?g, 19ø, ?h.
117. A5¹-P11¹(b) Ritter, November 1998, n° 450 = Ritter, List December 1997, n° 429. ?g, 18ø, ?h.
118. A5¹-P11¹(c) Numismatica Wien, 20–21 November 1975, n° 149. 3.72g, 18ø, 12h.
119. A5¹-P11¹(d) Lanz 66, 22 November 1993, n° 343. 3.65g, 19ø, ?h.
120. A5¹-P12¹(a) Emporium Hamburg, 17–18 May 1995, n° 74. ?g, 18ø, ?h.
121. A5¹-P13¹(a) Rauch, 22–24 April 1987, n° 100. ?g, 19ø, ?h.
122. A6¹-P1¹(a) Rauch, 8–9 November 1974, n° 31. ?g, 18ø, ?h.

Letter A (7)

Note: The legends are unreadable.

87. A1¹-P1¹(a) Vienna, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 12, n° 23160. ?g, 18ø, 12h.
88. A1¹-P1¹(b) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 18408, 4/10. 3.80g, 18ø, 12h.

123. A6¹-P14¹(a) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1923.150.407. 3.56g, 21ø, 12h.
 124. A8¹-P1¹(a) CNG 6, 1 March 1989, n° 148. 3.60g, 21ø, ?h.
 125. A8¹-P1¹(b) Müller (Münz Zentrum) 78, 7–9 September 1994, n° 113. 3.30g, 18ø, ?h.
 126. A8¹-P6¹(a) CNG 3, 29 April 1988, n° 207. 3.79g, 20ø, ?h.
 127. A8¹-P14¹(a) Numismatica Wien, 11–14 May 1976, n° 114. 3.64g, 18ø, 11h.
 128. A8¹-P? (a) Albrecht-Hoffmann 39, 16–17 April 1980, n° 716. 2.36g, 17ø, ?h.
 129. A10¹-P1¹(a) TKA, 15–16 April 1985, n° 119. 3.52g, 17ø, ?h.
 130. A10¹-P1¹(b) Burgan, 25 November 1991, n° 311. 3.58g, 19ø, ?h.
 131. A10¹-P1¹(c) CNG 18, 3 December 1991, n° 233. 3.52g, 18ø, ?h.
 132. A10¹-P1¹(d) CNG 37, 20 March 1996, n° 764. 3.65g, 17ø, ?h.
 133. A10¹-P1¹(e) Schenk-Behrens, 2 April 2004, n° 95. 2.92g, 17ø, ?h.
 134. A10¹-P1¹(f) Platt, December 1994, n° 198. 3.65g, 16ø, ?h.
 135. A10¹-P1¹(g) Peus 326, 1–3 November 1989, n° 411. 3.49g, 18ø, ?h.
 136. A10¹-P1¹(h) Albrecht-Hoffmann 65, 9–12 November 1988, n° 407. 3.54g, 19ø, ?h.
 137. A101-P101(a) Müller (Münz Zentrum) 106, 28–29 March 2001, n° 245. 3.45g, 20ø, ?h.
 138. A101-P151(a) Schulman, 15–16 October 1990, n° 396. 3.65g, 18ø, 12h.
 139. A101-P151(b) SKAB, 27–28 October 1987, n° 905. 3.65g, 18ø, ?h.
 140. A101-P161(a) Rauch, 5 November 2001, n° 152. 3.77g, 18ø, 12h.
 141. A101-P161(b) TKA, 14–15 April 1986, n° 186. 3.71g, 18ø, ?h.
 142. A101?-P17(a) Schulman 28–29 September 1976, n° 273. 3.83g, 19ø, ?h.
 143. A141-P11(a) Hirsch 183, 20–24 September 1994, n° 720. 3.75g, 17ø, ?h.
 144. A141-P111(a) Albrecht-Hoffmann 68, 25–27 April 1990, n° 540. 3.68g, 18ø, ?h.
 145. A141-P131(a) Ritter, List December 1998, n° 369. ?g, 19ø, ?h.
 146. A141-P131(b) CGF, 16 June 2000, n° 116. 3.70g, 19ø, 12h.
 147. A191?-P11(a) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1973.56.1718. 3.39g, 20ø, 12h.
 148. A191-P11(b) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1944.100.83557. 3.78g, 20ø, 12h.
 149. A191-P21(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Prokesch-Osten collection, Cabinet 14/58, n° 5/10. 3.55g, 19ø, 12h.
 150. A191-P181(a) Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, n.c. 3.68g, 16ø, 12h.
 151. A191-P191(a) Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, n.c. 3.35g, 18ø, 12h.
 152. A191-P201(a) Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, n.c. 3.60g, 18ø, 12h.
 153. A191-P211(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Imhoof-Blumer collection, Cabinet 14/58, n° 4/2. 3.82g, 19ø, 12h.
 154. A191-P211(b) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1938.50.230. 3.43g, 19ø, 12h.
 155. A191-P221(a) Noble Numismatics 49, 22–24 November 1995, n° 2070. 3.66g, 17ø, ?h.
 156. A211-P21(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Prokesch-Osten collection, Cabinet 14/58, n° 5/4. 3.70g, 19ø, 12h.
 157. A21¹-P15¹(a) CGF, 27 November 2004, n° 169. 3.52g, 20ø, 12h.
 158. A21¹-P23¹(a) Albrecht-Hoffmann 59, 29–31 October 1986, n° 1275. 3.71g, 18ø, ?h.
 159. A21¹-P24¹(a) Peus 343, 26–28 April 1995, n° 272. 3.57g, 19ø, ?h.
 160. A23¹-P1¹(a) Hirsch 229, 17–20 September 2003, n° 2032. 3.74g, 18ø, ?h.
 161. A23¹-P1¹(b) Numismatic Fine Arts, 24–25 March 1977, n° 406. 3.43g, 18ø, ?h.
 162. A23¹-P15¹(a) Numismatic Fine Arts, List, 20 October 1978, n° 105. ?g, 17ø, ?h.
 163. A23¹-P?(a) Harlan J. Berk, 22 July 2003, n° 168. 3.67g, 17ø, ?h.
 164. A26¹-P25¹(a) Peus 326, 1–3 November 1989, n° 409. 3.56g, 20ø, ?h.
 165. A30¹-P1¹(a) Rauch, 30 October–1 November 1975, n° 37. ?g, 19ø, ?h.
- Note: The coin is overstruck.*
166. A31¹-P1¹(b) Ponterio & Associates, 1 November 1994, n° 394. 3.81g, 18ø, ?h.
 167. A31¹-P26¹(a) Ponterio & Associates, 1 November 1994, n° 393. 3.66g, 19ø, ?h.
 168. A31¹-P27(a) Dorotheum, 1–4 December 1981, n° 77. ?g, 18ø, ?h.
- Letter A (11)*
- Note: The legends are unreadable.*
169. A30¹-P1(a) Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, n.c. 3.67g, 17ø, 12h.
 170. A32¹-P2(a) Gorny & Mosch 130, March 2004, n° 1506. 3.66g, 17ø, ?h.
 171. A33-P3(a) Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, n.c. 3.78g, 18ø, 12h.

Group 2: Pellet over the bow on the reverse

References: Sellwood, *Coinage of Parthia*, 85/2.

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Note: The legends are unreadable.

172. A1¹-P1(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 19. 3.68g, 18ø, 12h.
173. A2¹-P2¹(a) Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, J. de Morgan collection, n° 1002. 3.75g, 21ø, 12h.
174. A2¹-P3(a) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1944.100.83568. 3.46g, 21ø, 1h.
175. A3¹-P4¹(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, 1850.0412.55. 3.50g, 20ø, 12h.
176. A4¹-P5(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 259/1882, 4/8. 3.31g, 20ø, 12h.
177. A5¹-P6¹(a) SKAZ, Spring 1982, n° 73. 3.77g, 20ø, ?h.
178. A5¹-P7¹(a) SKAZ, Spring 1980, n° 68. 3.69g, 20ø, ?h.
179. A6¹-P8¹(a) Peus 348, 2–4 May 1996, n° 341. 3.54g, 18ø, ?h.
180. A6¹-P9¹(a) Albrecht-Hoffmann 58, 23–25 April 1986, n° 1606. 3.73g, 18ø, ?h.
181. A6¹-P9¹(b) CNG 35, 20 September 1995, n° 415. 3.67g, 20ø, ?h.

182. A7¹-P6¹(a) Numismatic Fine Arts, List, 20 October 1978, n° 103. ?g, 19ø, ?h.
 183. A9¹-P6¹(a) Schenk-Behrens, 13-15 June 1996, n° 234. 3.48g, 21ø, ?h.
 184. A9¹-P6¹(b) Rauch, 18–20 January 1988, n° 190. ?g, 23ø, ?h.
 185. A9¹-P8¹(a) Gorny & Mosch 130, March 2004, n° 1493. 3.75g, 20ø, ?h.
 186. A14¹-P8¹(a) Elsen, List 192, July-August 1997, n° 107. 3.89g, 19ø, ?h.
 187. A14¹-P8¹(b) Peus 301, 25–27 May 1981, n° 539. 3.45g, 21ø, ?h.

Note: The coin is overstruck.

188. A14¹-P10¹(a) Numismatica Wien, 22–23 June 1977, n° 128. 3.69g, 21ø, ?h.
 189. A14¹-P11¹(a) Ponterio & Associates, 12 July 1994, n° 330. 3.80g, 20ø, 12h.
 190. A15¹-P8¹(a) Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, n.c. 1305. 3.49g, 20ø, 12h.
 191. A16¹-P8¹(a) CNG 39, 18 September 1996, n° 823. 3.81g, 19ø, ?h.
 192. A17¹-P10¹(a) Gilles Blançon, List 50, 2005, n° 293. ?g, 20ø, ?h.
 193. A19¹-P11¹(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1894,0506.2290. 3.27g, 19ø, 12h.
 194. A19¹-P12¹(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1891,0603.193. 3.77g, 21ø, 12h.
 195. A19¹-P13¹(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 5. 3.53g, 18ø, 12h.
 196. A19¹-P14(a) Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, J. de Morgan collection, n° 1004. 3.59g, 19ø, 12h.
 197. A19¹-P15¹(a) Van der Dussen, 19–20 April 1993, n° 122. 3.71g, 20ø, ?h.
 198. A20¹-P15¹(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1865,0805.20. 3.65g, 19ø, 12h.
 199. A20¹-P16(a) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1944.100.83555. 3.73g, 20ø, 12h.
 200. A21¹-P2¹(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1930,0812.68. 3.65g, 20ø, 12h.
 201. A21¹-P2¹ (b) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1900,0101.23. 3.70g, 19ø, 12h.
 202. A21¹-P17(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1900,0101.24. 3.48g, 17ø, 12h.
 203. A21¹-P18(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1930,0812.69. 3.60g, 18ø, 12h.
 204. A21¹-P19(a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1917,0204.148. 3.66g, 20ø, 12h.
 205. A21¹-P20(a) Athens, Numismatic Museum, Cabinet 54, n° 411. 3.58g, 18ø, 12h.
 206. A21¹-P21(a) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1944.100.83554. 3.29g, 19ø, 1h.
 207. A22¹-P6¹(a) Schenk-Behrens, 5–6 December 1996, n° 193. 3.72g, 20ø, ?h.
 208. A22¹-P6¹(b) Peus 318, 7-8 May 1987, n° 1348. 3.58g, 21ø, ?h.
 209. A22¹-P6¹(c) Dorotheum, 14 October 1983, n° 216. 3.80g, 19ø, ?h.
 210. A22¹-P8¹(a) Hirsch 231, 26-28 November 2003, n° 461. 3.84g, 18ø, ?h.
 211. A23¹-P22(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Löffbecke collection, Cabinet 14/58, n° 4/4. 3.76g, 18ø, 12h.

212. A31¹-P7¹(a) Birkler & Waddell, 9 December 1982, n° 144. 3.14g, 20ø, ?h.
 213. A31¹-P8¹(a) Ponterio & Associates, 1 August 1995, n° 358. 3.59g, 21ø, ?h.
 214. A34-P4¹ (a) London, British Museum, Cabinet 162, tray 22, n° 1917,0204.146. 3.44g, 23ø, 12h.
 215. A35¹-P6¹(a) Superior Stamp & Coin Co., Inc., World Coin List Summer, n° 61. 3.50g, 19ø, ?h.
 216. A35¹-P6¹(b) Lanz 97, 22 May 2000, n° 354. 3.74g, 20ø, ?h.
 217. A35¹-P8¹(a) CNG 31, 9-10 September 1994, n° 497. 3.63g, 19ø, ?h.
 218. A35¹-P8¹(b) Schulman, 2–4 June 1982, n° 320. 3.64g, 20ø, ?h.
 219. A35¹-P10¹(a) Rauch, 7–8 June 1977, n° 96 = Numismatica Wien, 9-11 November 1976, n° 469. ?g, 20ø, ?h.
 220. A35¹-P24(a) CNG 37, 20 March 1996, n° 763. 3.55g, 19ø, ?h.
 221. A36-P8¹(a) Peus 372, 30 October 2002, n° 712. 3.85g, 24ø, ?h.
 222. A37-P10¹(a) Vienna, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 12, n° 23161. ?g, 19ø, 12h.
 223. A38¹-P12¹(a) Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, n.c. 1307. 3.39g, 19ø, 12h.
 224. A38¹-P15¹(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° ? 3.73g, ?ø, 12h.
 225. A39-P23¹(a) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1944.100.83556. 3.45g, 22ø, 12h.
 226. A40-P23¹(a) Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, J. de Morgan collection, n° 1003. 3.03g, 20ø, 12h.
 227. A41¹-P24(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Prokesch-Osten collection, Cabinet 14/58, n° ? 3.53g, ?ø, 12h.

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Note: The legends are unreadable.

228. A4¹-P1¹(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 30/1873, 5/7. 3.75g, 19ø, 12h.
 229. A19¹-P2¹(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 18412, 5/5. 3.53g, 17ø, 12h.
 230. A19¹-P3(a) Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, n.c. 1306. 3.53g, 17ø, 12h.
 231. A19¹-P4(a) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1974.52.31. 3.75g, 19ø, 1h.
 232. A19¹-P? (a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 18411, 5/3. 3.71g, 17ø, 12h.
 233. A21¹-P1¹(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Cabinet 14/58, n° 18410, 5/2. 3.51g, 17ø, 12h.
 234. A21¹-P2¹(a) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1944.100.83558. 3.50g, 21ø, 12h.
 235. A21¹-P2¹(b) New York, American Numismatic Society, tray 971, n° 1923.150.408. 3.49g, 19ø, 12h.
 236. A21¹-P5(a) Berlin, Münzkabinett, Guthrie collection, Cabinet 14/58, n° 5/8. 3.65g, 17ø, 12h.
 237. A38¹-P6(a) Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, n.c. 1304. 3.66g, 19ø, 12h.
 238. A42-P7(a) Schenk-Behrens, 12-13 September 2000, n° 119. 3.30g, 19ø, ?h.

Series II

Obverse: id.

Reverse: No archer and no letter. Legend only.

New type/unicum

Note: The legend is unreadable.

239. A1¹-P1(a) Gorny & Mosch 130, March 2004, n° 1492 = CNG 36, 1995, n° 440. 3.80g, 18ø, ?h.

NB: Unicum for the reverse.

New type/unicum or photographic error?

Note: The legend is unreadable.

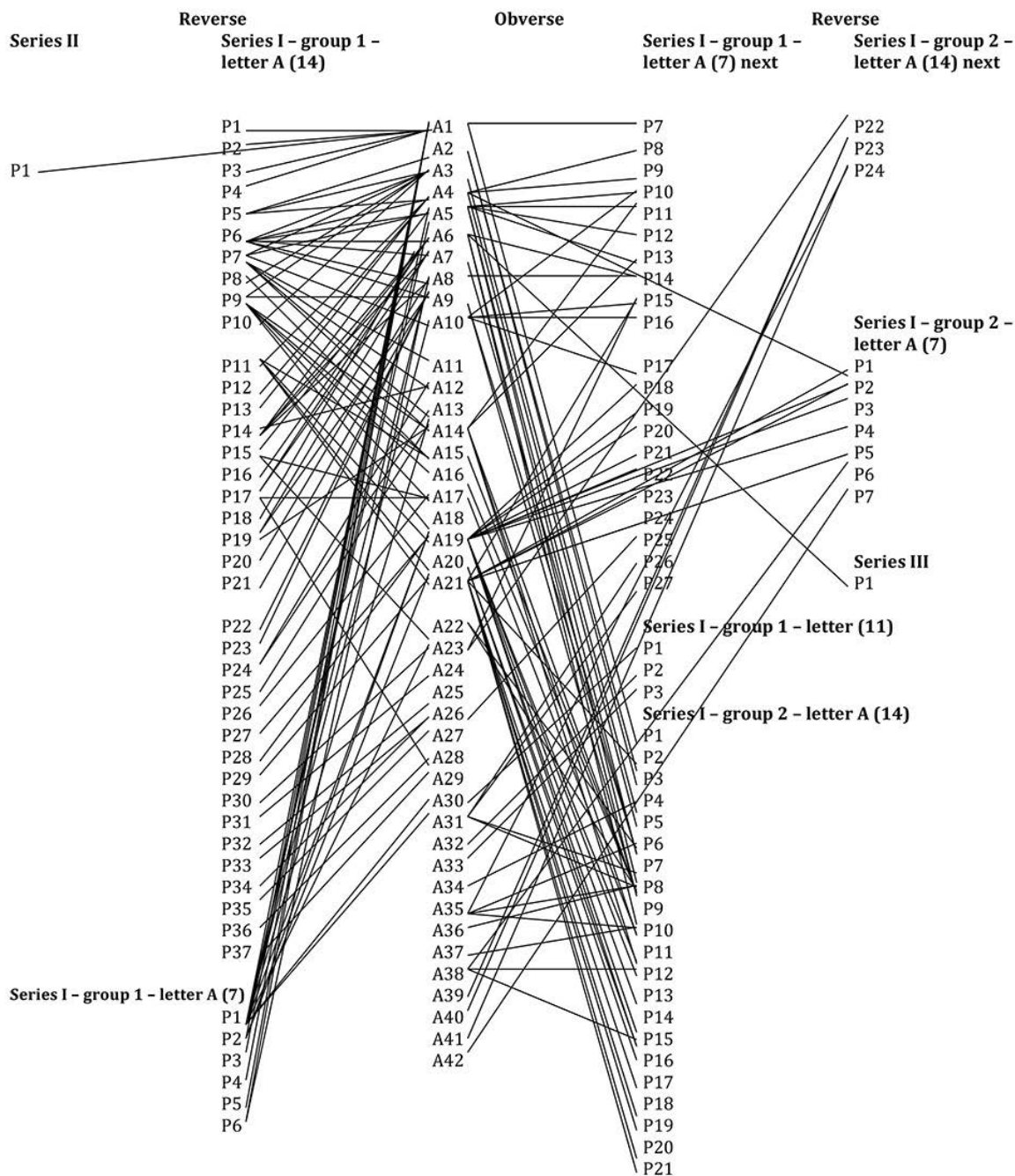
240. A6¹-P1(a) CNG 51, 15 September 1999, n° 642. 3.37g, 20ø, ?h.

Series III

Obverse: id.

Reverse: Archer seated left (photographic error in the catalogue?).

Letter A (7) in right field.

Die-links

The Coinages of Paradan and Sind in the Context of Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian Numismatics

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It is a well-known fact that the absolute chronology of the history of Central Asia and northern India during the Kushan period still offers some disputed problems. Even if nowadays the majority of researchers prefer a starting date of the Kanishka Era in 127 AD,¹ the question still cannot be regarded as having been solved once and for all – too many problems, especially of a methodological nature, remain. It should also be emphasised that a degree of consensus is no proof of anything – after all, truth (or at least the highest degree of probability) in academic questions does not necessarily follow democratic principles. I have stated on several occasions² that I do not believe the current theory that regal year one of Kanishka equals 127 AD to be correct.

It should be remembered that even if some of Robert Göbl's ideas have proved flawed, many of his suggestions are still worthy of consideration. After all, his work is of pivotal importance for our understanding of Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian coinage, especially when it comes to the uniquely important topic of the reconstruction of numismatic systems. It is superfluous to underline the importance of coins for the reconstruction of Kushan history.³ While it is essential to re-evaluate ideas articulated in earlier research, new scientific developments must also be incorporated. In this paper I will on the one hand re-examine a very important idea of Göbl concerning ribbed ribbons on Kushan coinage in the light of new developments in research on Paradan coinage. On the other hand, I will briefly discuss the gold coinage of Sind modelled after Sasanian prototypes and draw some comparisons with the Kushano-Sasanian coin series.

The coinage of Paradan and ribbed ribbons on Kushan coinage

Göbl repeatedly claimed that the use of ribbed ribbons on gold issues of the Kushan King Huvishka must have been influenced by Sasanian imperial coins (Figures 14.1, 14.2).⁴ Since Ardashir I (224–240 AD), the first Sasanian King of Kings, whose absolute chronology can be established beyond doubt, was also the first to use this feature on his coinage – mostly (Figures 14.3, 14.5), but not always (Figure 14.4) – it follows according to Göbl that the respective Huvishka coins must be later than 224 AD. It has to be emphasised that Huvishka's first emission in mint A already shows ribbed ribbons.⁵ If this feature was really taken over from the Sasanians, then Huvishka's accession to the throne must be dated later than that of Ardashir I, which means that it is not possible to let the two reigns overlap in such a way that Huvishka became king earlier than 224 AD. One argument in favour of Göbl's interpretation is the fact that both in Huvishka's mint A⁶ as well as under Ardashir I (Figures 14.3, 14.4),⁷ coins with ribbed ribbons occur alongside specimens with plain ribbons; the patterns of their use is thus very similar. In mint B, the common occurrence of ribbed ribbons commences later than in A.⁸ According to the current *communis opinio*, however, combining the alleged starting date of the Kanishka Era of 127 AD with the date range for Huvishka provided by the inscriptions (years 26 to 64 of the Kanishka Era)⁹ results in a chronological frame for his reign of c. 153 to 191 AD, that is to say, at least thirty-three years earlier than the accession to the throne of the Sasanian king Ardashir I, and thus the earliest possible date for the introduction of ribbed ribbons in Sasanian coinage.



Figure 14.1: Kushan. Huvishka, dinar, Mint A. Göbl 1984, no. 154. CNG, Auction 87 (18 May 2011), lot 771.



Figure 14.2: Kushan. Huvishka, dinar, Mint B. Göbl 1984, no. 342. CNG, Auction 91 (19 Sept. 2012), lot 457.



Figure 14.3: Sasanian. Ardashir I, drachm, Mint B/“Hamadan”. Alram/Gyselen 2003, type IIIb/3b. CNG, Auction 91 (19 Sept. 2012), lot 466.



Figure 14.4: Sasanian. Ardashir I, drachm, Mint B/“Hamadan”. Alram/Gyselen 2003, type IIIb/3b. CNG, e-auction 272 (25 Jan. 2012), lot 184.



Figure 14.5: Sasanian. Ardashir I, tetradrachm, Mint C/“Ctesiphon”. Alram/Gyselen 2003, type IIe/3a. Schaaf coll.

If one accepts the 127 AD starting date for the Kanishka Era, one must then assume that Huvishka invented the ribbed ribbons independently of Ardashir I. Since they occur only on coins of this single Kushan king, while they represent a major and typical feature of Sasanian art in all different media – not only coins – it seems highly improbable to me that the ribbed ribbons were taken over from these Kushan coins by Ardashir I. But even the idea that this treatment of the ribbons was invented independently by Huvishka before the emergence of the Sasanian empire is very unlikely: after all, ribbed ribbons were never used on any coin issue at all before Ardashir I. True, ribbed ribbons can be seen on a few rock reliefs attributed to the Parthian period.¹⁰ But if we limit ourselves to numismatics, they cannot be found in the Arsacid coin series. With a symbol of power as important as the diadem,¹¹ we can safely assume that the rendering of the diadem ribbons had a religious and political meaning, even if it is difficult for us nowadays to specify it. The parallel depiction in Sasanian and Kushan coinage thus in all probability is not due to some chance contacts between different die cutters and thus devoid of any deeper meaning, but rather relates to imperial propaganda. Considering the natural opposition between a western Iranian and an eastern Iranian empire, it might be more than guesswork to assume that the use of the ribbed ribbons is connected with a religio-political position in the world of Iran to which both Ardashir I and his successors, as well as Huvishka, aspired. It should be remembered that both the Sasanian and the Kushan ruler bore the title “King of Kings”.

New and potentially important evidence can be brought into this discussion by taking into account the coin series of the kings of Paradan (*Pāratarājas*),¹² a principality in what is today south-western Pakistan.¹³ It has been studied in a series of articles by Tandon.¹⁴ In the famous inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam,¹⁵ Shapur I (240–272 AD) claims to have been lord of Paradan. But this assertion of direct Sasanian rule is seriously invalidated by the independent coinage of the kings of Paradan. I agree with Tandon that the numismatic evidence strongly implies that Paradan “may never really have been a province of the Sasanian empire at all”.¹⁶ In the inscription of Narseh (293–302/3 AD) at Paikuli, the king of Paradan is mentioned among the rulers who “stayed by my (Narseh’s) advice and counsel”,¹⁷ which tells us nothing about the status of Paradan. It should be stressed that even if some elements of the coinage are Indian rather than Iranian, other evidence, especially from onomastics, proves that the kings of Paradan were Iranians.¹⁸

Now to my main point: in discussing the numismatic evidence, Tandon claims that “One surprise in the Pārata coinage is that it betrays no Sasanian influence whatsoever. Neither the fabric nor any of the design elements on the coins seem to have any similarity with Sasanian coinage”; “the coins (sc. the Paradan issues) show no Sasanian influence in terms of design, fabric or denomination”.¹⁹

I think that this is not entirely accurate. Without doubt, the main parameters of Paradan coinage are independent of Sasanian traditions. Their style is different; they show a typical Parthian weight standard;²⁰ the legends are written in either Brahmi or Kharoshthi; the reverse symbol is much more Indian than Iranian. But there is one very important feature which connects some Paradan issues with Sasanian coins: the last kings (according to Tandon) employ ribbed ribbons on their issues (Figures 14.6, 14.7, 14.8).



Figure 14.6: Paratarajas. Koziya. CNG, e-auction 268 (16 Nov. 2011), lot 168.



Figure 14.7: Paratarajas. Koziya. CNG, e-auction 212 (17 June 2009), lot 154.



Figure 14.8: Paratarajas. Datayola II. <http://coinindia.com/galleries-parata-rajars.html>, coin no. 23.



Figure 14.9: Paratarajas. Datayola II. Tandon 2009, fig. 18.



Figure 14.10: Kushano-Sasanian. Ohrmazd I/Kavad. Göbl 1984, type 1124. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Münzkabinett.

As in the case of the Kushan kings, there is no explicit information regarding the absolute chronology of the rulers of Paradan. There are, however, several glimpses which allow us some insights. From a numismatic point of view, the most important piece of evidence is the overstrike of two Paradan coins of Datayola II (Figure 14.8), dated by Tandon to c. 275–300 or c. 300–325 AD,²¹ on Kushano-Sasanian issues of Ohrmazd 1 and the “satrap” Kavad (Figure 14.10).²² Based on the evidence from imperial Sasanian coinage, the former’s reign started after 300 AD.²³ Independently of my approach, Tandon thus arrives at a very similar absolute date for Datayola II. The uncertainty of a mere twenty-five years, it should be borne in mind, is not so much when one considers that as regards Year One of Kanishka I, we are still uncertain about the century, let alone the decade. Still, this certain and reliable numismatic link between Kushano-Sasanian and Paradan coinage can definitely serve as a chronological anchor, so to speak, with which to moor the last Paradan kings. I basically agree with Tandon, bearing in mind that even these absolute dates must remain hypothetical since we have no direct information for the individual durations of the reigns. The absolute dating by Tandon is as follows:²⁴

Yolamira:	c. 125–150 or c. 150–175 AD
Bagamira:	c. 150–155 or c. 175–180 AD
Arjuna:	c. 155–165 or c. 180–190 AD
Hvaramira:	c. 165–175 or c. 190–200 AD
Mirahvara:	c. 175–185 or c. 200–210 AD
Miratakhma:	c. 185–200 or c. 210–225 AD
Kozana:	c. 200–215 or c. 225–240 AD
Bhimarjuna:	c. 215–225 or c. 240–250 AD
Koziya:	c. 225–250 or c. 250–275 AD
Datavharna:	c. 250–275 or c. 275–300 AD
Datayola II:	c. 275–300 or c. 300–325 AD

Judging from the evidence of the overstrikes cited above and my own chronology of the Kushano-Sasanian rulers, the second, slightly later variant seems more likely to me. This actually opens a quite fascinating, if highly speculative possibility. In the Paradan series, there is a marked deterioration in metal quality from silver or rather good billon to bronze under Bhimarjuna.²⁵ Accepting the later dating for him, and bearing in mind that these dates are all approximate, one can hardly avoid the impression that there is a connection between the metrological developments in Paradan and the dramatic fall from billon to copper in the Roman empire in 260 AD under the Emperor Gallienus (sole reign 260–268 AD). Tandon himself has raised the possibility that there might have been a connection between economic decline in Rome and the deterioration in metal quality in Paradan.²⁶ This minor adjustment in absolute chronology might help explain the phenomenon even better, despite the fact that no Roman elements are recognisable in the Paradan series.

One point needs to be addressed here: Tandon has compared the way the tunic is rendered on the large copper coins from Koziya onwards (Figure 14.7) to the rendering of the king's costume on Kushan coins from the time of Kanishka II.²⁷ However, there are basic differences in dress and attributes: the Kushan king wears a kaftan over a shirt,²⁸ while the kings of Paradan wear a tunic with a girdle. If the king wears body armour rather than a kaftan, under Kanishka II the hem is still straight,²⁹ thus the detail concerns different types of garment rather than necessarily different chronological layers. One might also add that some reverses of Huvishka show the tunic with a slightly curved hem rather than a completely straight one, which clearly proves that this variant existed well before Kanishka II.³⁰ While the sword at the waist is common to both series, the gesture of the left hand resting on the scabbard is purely Sasanian, and has no models in Kushan coinage.

By the way, there might be another connection in a matter of detail between Sasanian and Paradan coinage. In both series, an object resembling a lily sceptre is very occasionally encountered. While the Paradan ruler Datayola II holds it in his hand (Figure 14.11),³¹ on the Sasanian issues of Narseh it is simply placed in the right obverse field (Figure 14.12).³² Which way the influence worked is uncertain in this case. Once again, however, some type of interaction between Sasanian and Paradan coinage is probable.

Let us now return to the ribbed ribbons. As long as the basic chronological approximation of Tandon is accepted, it follows that the first king of Paradan to employ ribbed ribbons, Koziya, has to be dated after 224 AD, i.e. after the accession to power of Ardashir I. It seems once again obvious that the introduction of ribbed ribbons was directly influenced by Sasanian coinage; in the Paradan series, there are no chronological problems comparable to those

concerning the use of the ribbed design in Kushan coinage. If one does not want to go to extremes and claim that the rulers of Paradan also invented the ribbed ribbons independently of the Sasanians, then we have here a clear example of a basically self-contained eastern Iranian coin series taking over an important and typical feature from western Iran. If one accepts the now commonly agreed dating for the reign of Huvishka (c. 153–191 AD), this would mean that Koziya's issues are at least a quarter of century later than those of Huvishka. If one were to track the model for Koziya's ribbed ribbons to the Kushan issues of Huvishka, then first and foremost it is very strange that they were used so late after the original models were minted.

Another argument against this possible, but unlikely alternative explanation is the fact that Huvishka uses the ribbed ribbons only on his gold dinars, never on his bronze coinage, whereas all Paradan coins featuring this detail are made of copper.

But even if this is so, there is a strong argument for assuming direct connections between Kushan and Paradan coins. The object held by Koziya or Datayola II (Figures 14.7, 14.8) very much resembles the sceptre – called *Kolbenszepter* by Göbl³³ – held by Huvishka on many dinar issues (Figures 14.1, 14.2). However, while this element certainly has no Sasanian parallels, the way the ribbed ribbons are shown is certainly much more closely related to Ardashir's issues such as Figure 14.5, so one cannot simply use the evidence of this sceptre to explain away the ribbed ribbons in Paradan as adopted from an independent Kushan innovation pre-dating Ardashir I. Thus, I would claim that there exists a certain “triangle” between Sasanian, Kushan and Paradan coinage which belongs to the second to the fourth quarters of the third century AD.

It goes without saying that one single pictorial detail in itself cannot solve a question as complex as that of Year One of Kanishka I. Still, I feel confident that we have here clear evidence that the typical Sasanian ribbed ribbons were taken over in an eastern Iranian petty kingdom, definitely after their introduction in Sasanian Iran, and equally certainly, I believe, using Sasanian coins as a model. I think that this parallel can be of importance also for the question of Kushan chronology. If the ribbed ribbons were taken over from the Sasanians by the kings of Paradan, the same process becomes more likely also in the case of Huvishka's ribbons. This, in turn, would – as Göbl has repeatedly claimed – mean that the currently accepted date of Huvishka is incorrect, and that he must be dated after the accession to the throne of Ardashir I, i.e. after 224 AD.

The coinage of Sind

The second coin series which has so far never been studied in the context of Kushan or Kushano-Sasanian coinage is the Sind series. The plain reason is that this is another relatively



Figure 14.11: Paratarajas. Datayola II. Tandon 2009, fig. 15.



Figure 14.12: Sasanian. Narseh, drachm, style J = Sistan. Alram/Gyselen 2012, type Ia/2a. Schaaf coll.

obscure series. Even though these coins have been known for quite some time,³⁴ the first somewhat comprehensive treatments were published by Robert Senior about twenty years ago.³⁵ For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that one specimen was published by that great scholar of Sasanian numismatics, Robert Göbl, who, however, failed to make sense of it.³⁶ Based on Senior's remarks especially as regards the find spots, I addressed the question of these Sind issues briefly in SNS 3.³⁷ At that time, I was able to catalogue altogether eighteen gold dinars ranging chronologically from Shapur II's (309–379 AD) SNS type 2 to the third crown of Peroz (457–484 AD).³⁸ A quick look at the internet database www.coinarchives.com³⁹ shows how much more material is available today:

Table 14.1: Gold dinars of Sind

King	SNS 3	coinarchives	types
Shapur II	2	5	5
Ardashir II	3	-	2
Shapur III	4	5	3
Wahram IV	1	-	1
Yazdigird I	1	1	1
Wahram V	4	9	6
Yazdigird II	-	-	-
Peroz	3	35	5
1st crown	1	2	3
2nd crown	- ¹	-	-
3rd crown	2	33	2

1 Schindel 2004, vol. 2, pl. 145, no. C17 also seems to bear the third crown of Peroz, and not his second variant.

If a coin already catalogued in SNS 3 also turned up in www.coinarchives.com, I did not count it twice. "Types" means variants in legends or symbols, especially in front of the bust on the obverse.

The localisation of the series is based on provenances from coins in trade, from Sind itself,⁴⁰ as well as from Baluchistan and Kutch.⁴¹ However, these coins prove that Sind was not a Sasanian province in the same way as, for instance, Asuristan or Fars. The local peculiarities in typology, style and – especially important – denominations strongly imply that Sind was not under direct Sasanian control, but was rather a region where Persian rule was exercised in a more indirect way. Sasanian rule over Sind (if this is the correct interpretation of the more generic term "Hindustan")⁴² is mentioned in two Sasanian inscriptions. Shapur I claims in his inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam to be *inter alia* lord of "Hindustan";⁴³ and Shapur King of the Sakas lists apart from Sakastan and Tiran also Hindustan (*hndy*) as being under his rule.⁴⁴ However, we have seen above that in the case of Paradan, Shapur's claim and the

historical reality as mirrored by the coins are not necessarily always in accord. On rare Sasanian seals, the term *snd* is used, which definitely refers to Sind.⁴⁵ The fact that there seem to have been no attempts to introduce the silver drachm as the main currency in Sind, I believe, strongly argues against direct Sasanian rule. The drachms attributed by Göbl⁴⁶ to the same mint as the dinars with the alleged mint signature LYHC in fact belong to an eastern mint which I would locate much farther to the north-east, and which is attested until Wahram IV (388–399 AD).⁴⁷ Its style shows no connections with Sind. It must also be emphasised that while some dies might have been produced by western Iranian craftsmen, or at least under their guidance,⁴⁸ the "heavy" dinar weight had already been abandoned under Peroz's father Yazdigird II (438–457 AD) in the Sasanian series,⁴⁹ although it remained in use in Sind, albeit with some weight reductions. The "light" Sasanian dinar of c. 4.25 g⁵⁰ left no mark in the Sind series. In addition, anachronistic typological details like the attendants holding barsom bundles under Peroz should be mentioned.⁵¹



Figure 14.13: Sasanian. Shapur II, dinar. Mint VI = Marw. Schindel 2004, type Ia/1b. British Museum, Department of Coins and Medals.



Figure 14.14: Sasanian. Shapur II, dinar, Mint IX = "Kabul". Schindel 2004, type Ib1/3a. Goldberg, Auction 62 (1 Feb. 2011), lot 3151.



Figure 14.15: Sind. Shapur II, dinar. CNG, Mail Bid Sale 66 (19 Apr. 2004), lot 874.



Figure 14.16: *Sind. Shapur II, dinar. Triton XV (3 Jan. 2012), lot 1374.*

The starting point of the Sind series is under Shapur II, more specifically, his second reverse type (Figure 14.14), which served as the model for all Sind coins featuring his crown known to me (Figures 14.15, 14.16). Some of these Shapur II Sind dinars have been attributed by Göbl to an alleged mint “Rīhc” (Figure 14.15).⁵² It is mildly amusing that he stated that the reading of the word in the right obverse field as Pahlavi LYHC is “*eindeutig*”. In reality, it is not Pahlavi at all, but Brahmi. It simply says *sri*, “lord”,⁵³ and is attested on issues from Shapur II to Wahram V (420–438 AD), that is to say, to the last king in the series but one.⁵⁴ My idea is that *sri* refers to the Sasanian King of Kings depicted on the obverses as overlord, but hardly on the same semantic level as the regular imperial titulature on undoubtedly official Sasanian coins from regular mints within the Sasanian realm. It is also under Wahram V that for the last time very degenerate remains of a circular Pahlavi legend can be observed. *Sri* is not always encountered, however, since there are some variants which bear either a symbol in front of the bust or else nothing at all. Only under Peroz are the remains of the Pahlavi inscriptions finally dropped, and instead of the rather general word *sri* the legend *Rana Datasatya*⁵⁵, sometimes read as *Ranaditya Satya*,⁵⁶ is added on the reverse (Figure 14.21).⁵⁷

It is fascinating that even today, with a remarkable increase in traceable specimens, the most commonly attested rulers apart from Peroz (Figures 14.20, 14.21) are Shapur III (383–388 AD) (Figures 14.17, 14.18) and Wahram V (Figure 14.19). As of today, I know of five dinars for each from regular mints within Sasanian Iran,⁵⁸ which is markedly fewer than the nine and thirteen Sind gold coins respectively. It must also be emphasised that at the same time that I found on *coinarchives.com* the total of fifty-five Sind dinars listed above, I also found ninety Kushano-Sasanian gold pieces. That is to say that in sheer numbers these obscure Sind gold coins are about half as common as the much better studied Kushano-Sasanian dinars (Figure 14.22), which is in itself an important piece of information. Admittedly, the duration of the Kushano-Sasanian coin series is shorter. I believe that it began after 300 AD,⁵⁹ and that the regular coinage up to Wahram 6 did not extend beyond c. 360 AD. The Sind series, on the other hand, can be dated from the SNS type 2 of Shapur II,⁶⁰ which I believe was introduced after 325 AD, down into the later reign of Peroz, that is to say, in



Figure 14.17: *Sind. Shapur III, dinar. Triton VI (14 Jan. 2003), lot 524.*



Figure 14.18: *Sind. Shapur III, dinar. Schaaf coll.*



Figure 14.19: *Sind. Wahram V, dinar. Schaaf coll.*



Figure 14.20: *Sind. Peroz, dinar, 1st crown. CNG, e-auction 154 (13 Dec. 2006), lot 100.*



Figure 14.21: *Sind. Peroz, dinar, 3rd crown. Schaaf coll.*

the 480s AD, as *terminus post quem* for the use of the third crown. Thus, while the Kushano-Sasanian coins of the “main series” were produced over a period of not much more than half a century, the period of production of the Sind dinars was approximately three times longer. The real numerical relationship between the two series therefore should be given as c. one to six, but still, it must be emphasised that the Sind coinage is a rather substantial phenomenon, and not just an obscure and rare oddity.



Figure 14.22: Kushano-Sasanian. Ohrmazd I, dinar, Balkh. Göbl 1984, type 707. Goldberg, Auction 44 (10 Feb. 2008), lot 3679.

As regards Peroz, there are two remarkable features. While his rare first crown, for which I was able to collect only twelve drachms back in 2004,⁶¹ is attested by no less than three Sind dinars, his much more common second crown is still missing from the Sind series. As a reminder, it should be stated that in SNS 3, I was able to list twelve coins with the first crown, 143 with the second and 419 with the third.⁶² The patterns of minting in the Sind series clearly do not follow the imperial model, but I am unable to provide an explanation. However, Peroz dinars from Sind with his third and last crown are very common, as can be seen from Table 14.1, but there are only two variants. The vast majority show a sun symbol in front of the bust on the obverse and employ the Brahmi legend most commonly read as *Rana Datasatya* to each side of the fire altar on the reverse (Figure 14.21). This inscription replaces the attendants to the left and right of the altar and thus places this type at the

end of the series. Maybe the commonness of this particular type is due to the dispersal of a large coin hoard in trade, since the low number of variants is by comparison with the other kings quite untypical for the series.

Let us now have a look at the metrology of the Sind coins. The earliest issues cluster around 7.20 g and 7.30 g. This is the same area where the weight peak of the old, “heavy” Sasanian dinar lies; due to the rather small number of attested coins, it is not easy to define it with the utmost accuracy.⁶³ In any case, the weights of the Kushano-Sasanian dinars up to Wahram 6 are almost always heavier than 7.50 g, and their ideal weight seems to have been c. 7.80 g.⁶⁴ They certainly cannot have been the inspiration for the Sind series, which follows rather the weight of the imperial Sasanian dinar. Under Peroz at the latest, but maybe already during the reign of Wahram V, the ideal weight of the Sind dinars was lowered from the old Sasanian value of c. 7.20 g to a new, local standard of c. 6.90 g – a minor reduction of about 5%. This new weight standard can be observed very clearly under Peroz. The gold quality declined too, since several specimens are of a pale and sometimes even silverish appearance. Without accurate measurements, the details of these developments remain obscure to us. The deterioration in gold purity in the Sind series and in Late Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian coinage is certainly a parallel phenomenon.⁶⁵ But we should not forget that in the Sind series, the decline in gold purity becomes easily traceable only in the second quarter of the fifth century, at a time when a low gold content had been the rule in Bactria and northern India for at least half a century. The decline in

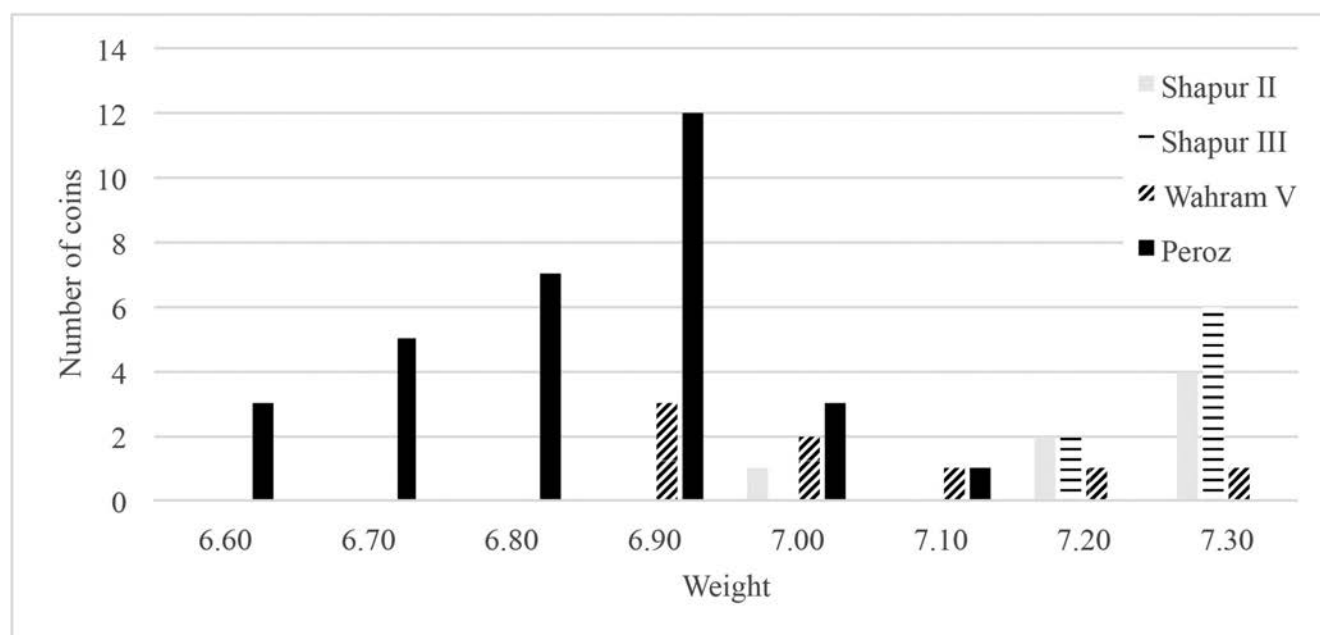


Figure 14.23: Metrology of the Sind coins

gold purity is thus not a simultaneous phenomenon in the Kushan world on the one hand and Sind on the other, even if the underlying economic reasons might easily have been interrelated.

What information do the Sind issues convey for our understanding of Kushano-Sasanian coinage? On the one hand, they show that a kind of Sasanian “provincial” coinage was also struck in areas other than Bactria and northern India. Without overlooking the basic differences, the mixture of imperial Sasanian and local, indigenous elements in typology, style, legends, denominations and so on of the Kushano-Sasanian series is therefore not unique.

On the other hand, although discussing the style of the Sind series is certainly difficult, it seems to me that the Shapur II Sind dinars show more similarities with eastern issues such as those from Marw and Herat than with western mints.⁶⁶ One Shapur III dinar (Figure 14.17) with a very clear *sri* in front of the bust shows on the reverse to the right and left of the bust in flames some Pahlavi letters which might represent MLWY, i.e. the mint name Marw. There are no Shapur III dinars from that city bearing the mint signature; his Marw issues lack the mint name and are of a markedly different style.⁶⁷ This position of the mint name is encountered on rare early Marw dinars of Shapur II which lack, however, the bust in flames (Figure 14.13). Even if the typological developments are thus somewhat complicated, it seems quite probable that the rather plentiful Sasanian gold coinage minted in Marw stimulated the Sind issues. After all, Marw is the most productive Sasanian gold mint in the fourth and early fifth centuries; additionally, it should be remembered that Kushano-Sasanian gold coins bearing this mint name also exist.⁶⁸ While this important mint might have originally influenced both the Kushano-Sasanian as well as the Sind gold coinage, these two series later on developed in different directions.

If we are to evaluate the historical information these two coin series can possibly convey, we need to be cautious because of the general lack of sources. However, it seems that in Sind the Sasanians did not encounter a monetary system as well developed as that of the Kushans, and therefore had more freedom of manoeuvre than in Bactria and Gandhara. They did not, however, try to introduce the silver drachm in Sind. While the various names of the Kushano-Sasanian rulers up to Wahram 6 most probably represent various governors sent to Kushanshahr by the Sasanian central government,⁶⁹ there can be no doubt that the person cited on the majority of Peroz’s Sind dinars was not a functionary of the Sasanian Empire. The different historical development of Kushanshahr and Sind can also be deduced from the fact that by the third quarter of the fourth century at the latest, the Sasanian Kings of Kings and their Kushano-Sasanian governors ceased to exercise any direct control in Bactria and most of Gandhara, while the Sasanian presence in Sind continued well into the reign of Peroz. The absence of coins of Yazdigird II might be

explained by military setbacks in the east during his reign.⁷⁰ The temporary successes of Peroz’s eastern campaigns⁷¹ are most probably mirrored in the resumption of the issue of Sind dinars, despite the enigmatic lack of known coins with his second crown. If the introduction of his third crown was occasioned by his first defeat of the Hephthalites,⁷² then the presence of the legend *Rana Datasatya* could be easily explained by assuming that the Sasanians had to acknowledge local rulers and cooperate with them in order to retain some influence in the area. After all, this Indian inscription replaces the generic term *sri* which I believe refers to the Sasanian king depicted on the obverse. Even before, the dinars were certainly not struck by regular Sasanian governors, but rather have to be seen in the context of much more indirect and less effective Iranian rule. The mention of an Indian – whatever his exact position might have been – is certainly quite a different matter. After the final defeat and death of Peroz in 484 AD,⁷³ Khurasan was lost,⁷⁴ and in the context of this catastrophe, the Sasanian position in Sind also collapsed.

Notes

- 1 Errington and Curtis 2007, p. 71 (with literature).
- 2 Schindel 2005a, Schindel 2009, p. 12–14; Schindel (in press).
- 3 For the coinage, cf. the only fully comprehensive study, Göbl 1984, with important additions and corrections in Göbl 1993; furthermore, Alram and Klimburg-Salter 1999; Errington and Curtis 2007.
- 4 Göbl 1984, pl. 179; Göbl 1999, p. 158, pl. 3.
- 5 Göbl 1984, pl. 11.
- 6 Göbl 1984, pl. 11–21.
- 7 Alram and Gyselen 2003, p. 95, pl. 1–19.
- 8 Göbl 1984, pl. 21–27.
- 9 Cribb 1999, p. 188.
- 10 For example, Bard-i Nishandeh (Kawami 1987, pl. 26), even if the similarities with reliefs from the undoubtedly Sasanian site of Bishapur (Bier 2009, p. 31, 36) might possibly advocate a date very close to that of Ardashir I.
- 11 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 64 f.
- 12 On the equation of the writing variants *Pārata* and *Pārada*, see Tandon 2012, p. 32 f.
- 13 Tandon 2012, p. 27.
- 14 Tandon 2006; Tandon 2009; Tandon 2010; Tandon 2012.
- 15 Back 1978, p. 287.
- 16 Tandon 2012, p. 27.
- 17 Skjærvø 1983, p. 54.
- 18 Tandon 2012, p. 36.
- 19 Tandon 2012, p. 22.
- 20 Tandon 2012, p. 34; Alram and Gyselen 2003, p. 162, 167.
- 21 Tandon 2009, fig. 18; Tandon 2012, p. 35.
- 22 Göbl 1984, type 1124.
- 23 Schindel 2005; Schindel 2012.
- 24 Tandon 2009, p. 155; in Tandon 2012, p. 49–54 he uses the earlier chronology with some minor modifications.
- 25 Tandon 2009, p. 146.
- 26 Tandon 2012, p. 38.

- 27 Tandon 2012, p. 35 f.; cf. Göbl 1984, pl. 33–51.
- 28 Göbl 1984, p. 37 f., pl. 160.
- 29 Göbl 1984, pl. 33, no. 538, pl. 34, no. 547 f.
- 30 For example, Göbl 1984, pl. 19, no. 265, pl. 26, no. 351, pl. 27, no. 382.
- 31 Tandon 2009, p. 151.
- 32 Alam and Gyselen 2012, p. 330.
- 33 Göbl 1984, p. 36 f.
- 34 Paruck depicts four Sind coins on his plates: one Shapur II dinar (Paruck 1924, vol. 2, pl. 11, no. 253), two pieces of Ardashir II (Paruck 1924, vol. 2, pl. 12, no. 258 f.), and one of Shapur III (Paruck 1924, vol. 2, pl. 12, no. 262).
- 35 Senior 1996; Senior 1990; Senior 1991a; Senior 1991b; Senior 2002.
- 36 Göbl 1987, p. 215, no. E28, pl. 31, fig. 31, in reality an early Peroz issue from Sind.
- 37 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 507–509, vol. 2, pl. 145.
- 38 Schindel 2004, vol. 2, pl. 145.
- 39 As at October 5th, 2012.
- 40 Senior 1990, p. 15.
- 41 Senior 1990, p. 15; Senior 1991a, p. 42.
- 42 Gyselen 1989, p. 87 f.; more strongly for this equation, Gyselen 2002, p. 193.
- 43 Back 1978, p. 287 (Pahlavi *hndstn*, Greek *INAIA*).
- 44 Back 1978, p. 492.
- 45 Gyselen 1989, p. 112; Gyselen 2002, p. 42.
- 46 Göbl 1984, pl. 143, no. 1353.
- 47 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 238.
- 48 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 509.
- 49 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 375.
- 50 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 99 f.
- 51 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 508.
- 52 Göbl 1984, p. 54, pl. 143, no. 1352.
- 53 Senior 1991, on the authority of G. von Mitterwallner.
- 54 Schindel 2004, vol. 2, p. 145.
- 55 Senior 1996.
- 56 Tandon 2008, p. 21, note 28.
- 57 Senior 1996; Nelson 2011, p. 424, no. 1042.
- 58 Schindel 2004, Bd. 2, pl. 25, nos. A6 f.; pl. 59, nos. A4, A5; pl. 64, no. A29; SNS Schaaf (in press).
- 59 Schindel 2012.
- 60 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 216 f.
- 61 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 402.
- 62 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 402, tab. 34.
- 63 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 99 f.
- 64 Göbl 1984, p. 115 f.
- 65 Blet-Lemarquand 2006.
- 66 Göbl 1984, pls. 133 f., 136–138.
- 67 Schindel 2004, vol. 2, pl. 32, no. N2.
- 68 Göbl 1984, pl. 114, nos. 1026 f.
- 69 Schindel (in preparation).
- 70 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 386.
- 71 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 414 f.
- 72 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 390–399.
- 73 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 418.
- 74 Schindel 2004, vol. 1, p. 435, 448, 490 f.

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